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URSULA.

A TALE OF COUNTRY LIFE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "AMY HERBERT," "IVORS,"
ETC., ETC.

Come away: for Life and Thought
Here no longer dwell;
But in a city glorious,
A great and distant city, have bought
A mansion incorruptible.

TENNYSON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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URSULA.

CHAPTER I.

It is pleasant to remember the events of years gone by. I shall try to recollect those of my own life. I may not be able to put down everything regularly, but some things that have happened cannot be forgotten, and these will help me to others. Mrs. Weir was very kind in teaching me as she did when I was a girl. I suppose she never thought of the use I should put my learning to; and perhaps, after all, it may not be of use. I took little heed to advice which was given me when I was young, and so, perhaps, no heed will be given to me when I tell of my mistakes and difficulties. But time goes on fast, and I would fain, if I could, act up now to what Mrs. Weir used to say, in her gentle way: "Ursula, my child, we must do good in our generation." God knows, I have done little enough in mine. I may not always have fallen short wilfully, but there is not much comfort in such a thought when one sees what has been neglected, except as regards oneself and the hope of forgiveness. Anyhow, I can but strive to make up for it, and the thought of having striven may be a comfort when I come to die.

I must begin at the beginning, the time which I can first remember. That was when we all lived at Sandcombe—my father, and mother, and William, and Roger, and I;—but I don't know much of those days. The farm must have been very different then from what it is now, and people's ways of going on must have been different too. I remember my mother always wore a cotton or stuff gown, with a coloured

handkerchief folded over her neck, and used to get up at four o'clock in the morning, and help about all kinds of things which we should leave to the maids, and I can quite well recollect going out with her to see the cows milked, and her teaching one of the dairy-maids how to churn the butter; but almost everything else is gone from me, for I have known Sandcombe since, and so the notions I have of it are confused. My father and mother died when I was about six years old. My father was taken first; he had been failing a long time: he caught a cold from being overheated at harvest, and never recovered it, and my poor mother took a fever soon after, and was ill for a month, and then she went too. It was a great grief to me, though I could not understand it properly. My mother was a very good woman, and taught me in the best way she could; but she never had much learning, and was always busy, and so I had been left a good deal to my own ways, and was spoilt and very headstrong. The only person who could manage me properly was my brother Roger, and I don't know how he did it, for he was never quick with me as William was, but somehow I loved him more than any one else from the time I was a baby. They used to say, that when I was in arms, if I cried, they always gave me to Roger to be quieted; and I suppose the same feeling grew up with me afterwards: yet in those days I could not have known properly what there was to love in him, and there were some things about him which might naturally have frightened me. He was a very tall, large-made man, quite noted all round the country for his strength, —the best rider and cricketer to be found for miles. He had a power of work which was quite wonderful; up in the morning with the labourers, and later to bed than any of us, and never seeming to want sleep as others did. His manner, though kind, was rough, and his voice was rather harsh. He spoke out his mind plainly when called upon, but at other times he was much given to silence. These things were not likely to win a child's heart; but there is something, I am sure, which God gives to such little ones to teach them whom they may trust; and so it was that not a baby ever came into the house but it would go to Roger at once. It was his fancy for children which they felt, I suppose, for he was

curiously fond of them. He had a tender way, indeed, with everything which was put under his care, or made to lean upon him: colts, and kittens, and puppies were his delight, when he could not get hold of a child. It was such a pleasure to him, I imagine, to feel his own great strength by the side of their weakness. I don't think he was ever happier than when he could take me up in his arms and carry me out to the yard, and set me on the back of one of the huge waggon-horses, and make it carry me round the field. He and the horse seemed to be so entirely of one mind; and when he saw I was not frightened, he would pat me on the shoulder and say, "There's a Trot!"—it was his pet name for me,—"she'll make a woman after all!" He had a great notion that women were not to be cowards, and I don't think I was a coward about anything but the dark; I never liked that. All this alone, however, would never have made me feel for Roger as I did when I grew up. But when I began at all to understand things, I felt that there was something about him different from most other people, beside his tender heart and his great strength. William was kind, too, and a strong, bluff-looking man, with a hearty, good-natured manner; but the two brothers were quite unlike. In those days we did what is seldom, I believe, done now; we dined at the same time as the servants, in a little room opening out of the kitchen, which has since been altered. When William came in to dinner, every one had to make way for him, and he had the best of all there was put before him, and nothing was thought of till he was cared for. It was all very proper, for he was the eldest and the master; but then he took it so much as his right, and never seemed to consider whether others were comfortable so long as he had what he wanted himself. But Roger never forgot any one. Before he sat down he had a kind word, though it might be rough-spoken, even for the little girl who helped in the dairy, and whom he never saw except at meal-times. He was a little hasty, and so was William; but Roger always said he was sorry, and William never did. They had different ways, too, of doing kindnesses; William made a fuss about his, and talked as if he was afraid they would be forgotten, but I don't think Roger ever knew when he was kind; it came to him as easily

as eating or drinking. He was not, like some people, put out by being thanked, but he laughed as though it was strange to him that what he had done should be thought of any consequence. There were deeper things, besides, which made the difference,—things which I can see into now, though I could only feel them then. William would give out an oath sometimes, when he was very angry; but let Roger be provoked to the utmost, yet a bad word never passed his lips. He had the fear of God before his eyes more than any man I ever knew: not in talking,—he was shut up about religion to grown-up people, and seldom came out about it at all, indeed, except to children,—but he made everybody feel it, in a way which was wonderful. When William had let out an oath, he would beg Roger's pardon, as though he had been a clergyman. After my mother's death, Roger was the person who took care that I should remember to say my prayers, and learn my catechism. He was fond of reading himself, and liked to see me take to it, and when I was a very little thing, he used to hear me read a hymn on Sunday, and then, when I was older, a chapter in the Gospel, and when I had done, he would set me on his shoulder as a reward, and carry me round the kitchen. He was more my teacher in those days than any one. I had a kind of nurse to look after me, but she had work to do besides, and she was very ignorant, only a labourer's widow, who had never been to school. I might have grown up like a little heathen but for Roger, for I was so young, and so tiny of my age, that my brothers did not like me to go across the down by myself to school, either to Compton or Hatton; and Sandcombe was a very lonely place, there were no older children near who could take me with them. The plan was talked about sometimes, and the clergyman from Compton called several times, and said it would be a good thing; but William always put it off, and declared there was time enough before me. Thus I went on till I was nine years old, without having had any teaching except what I had learnt first from my mother and then from Roger. But I knew a great deal, for such a child, about pigs, and horses, and cows, and dairy-work, and that might have been as good for me as books; for I had such a natural liking for learning,

that when I was put in the way of it I took to it at once, without any trouble, and the liking has stood by me all my life.

I lived at Sandcombe, never thinking of a change, for what child ever does think of it? Roger was all in all to me, and I had no thought of being parted from him. So it was, that it came upon me one day suddenly like a thunderbolt, that there was an idea of his leaving us. I don't think I quite believed it,—it seemed like an impossibility,—but it frightened me without my understanding it, and I jumped upon his knee (he had been playing with me just before I went to bed, and he was sitting inside the great open hearth in the inner kitchen), and put my arms round his neck, and said, he was Father Roger and Brother Roger, and I would go wherever he went, and no one should take me from him.

I believe those words decided my fate. My father had died only moderately well off; he had his farm stock, but not much else. All had been left to my mother, and after her to my brothers. I dare say it was intended to make some provision for me, but the business was put off and never done. William managed the farm for my mother whilst she lived. He and Roger were both a great many years older than myself. There had been a number of children between us, but they had all died very young; and I suppose this circumstance made me all the more a pet.

After my mother's death, William proposed to keep on the farm, and Roger stayed on for some time to help him, but somehow it did not quite do; William liked his own way and was apt to speak out, and Roger remembered (I know it, because he often told me of it in after years) that saying in the Bible, "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city;" and so he would not put himself any longer in the way of it, but proposed, instead, that there should be some equal division of the property made, and then that he should go forth to seek his own fortune.

That was quite Roger's fashion,—avoiding offence, he used to call it. Some persons said he was often unwise, and could not stand up properly for his own rights; and there might have been some truth in their words, but I loved him

all the better for giving up, because it was so unlike what I should have done myself. Of all things I hated being put upon; and when I was a very little thing I used to strike my fist upon the table, and say, "You dare!" when any one offended me, and I might have gone on saying "You dare!" till now, but for Roger.

William was honest and just in his ways, according to the world's notion of justice, and he and Roger settled their business very amicably, both of them agreeing that a portion should be set aside for me; and, no doubt, I was as well off as though the will had been made out by a lawyer.

When William put his name to the agreement, he said out strongly (so Roger told me afterwards) that the child should never know want whilst he had a penny to give her. It was very kind of him. I dare say he talked more than Roger, who said little about things he cared for.

They put aside two hundred and fifty pounds for me, and then Roger and William divided the rest.

And now Roger meant to leave Sandcombe. William intended to marry as soon as he could, for he said he should never manage without a "missis" to look after things. As for me, there was a notion of sending me to school. We were about eight miles from Hove, the market-town. It was a very good-sized, flourishing place, and there were decent schools in it: one was kept by a cousin of my mother's, and it was thought that I should do very well there. I was to come back to Sandcombe for the holidays, and William hinted that by and by, when he had a "missis," I might return and live there entirely.

Roger had sometimes thought of going to Canada, and setting up for himself there as a farmer; and no doubt he might have done very well. But then he could not possibly have taken me too; and seeing me so bent upon staying with him, he began to think of something else. I fancy also it came across him that I might have a doubtful kind of life with William and his wife. William was all for this world,—making money; not dishonourably, but still making it,—and he had his eye (Roger knew this) upon a hard kind of young woman living at Hatton Farm, two miles from us, whose father was said to be very well to do in the world.

Leah Morris was her name. Roger never liked her, and she never liked Roger. I don't think he took kindly to the notion of my being left under her.

He kissed me very much when I clung to him that night, but he made no promises; only he whispered, "Ursie, little one, we will do what God tells us;" and then he bade me go to bed, and I went and cried myself to sleep.

I did not see Roger again till the next day at dinner. He was out to work too early for me; but I always dined with him and with William in the little parlour. The farm-servants sat at a long table in the kitchen, and we in the inner room could see all that went on. William was very strict with his servants; he kept them all in excellent order; and treated them very fairly. They had good food, and enough of it. Sandcombe bacon had quite a name in the country; and the cheese, though it was so hard that it almost required a hatchet to cut it, had a very good flavour when it had been kept a little while; and some of our friends at Hove used to have a present of a cheese made them once a year, they were so fond of it. It was a pretty sight enough to see the dinner. The inner kitchen was much higher than the rooms that are built in these days. It had a great oak beam going across it, and there were odd things hung about the walls,—a pair of stag's horns, and some guns, and an old leathern jack, such as people used to drink out of in very old days; it was given to my grandfather, and was very much prized. And all the pots, and pans, and dishes were kept bright and clean, and the stone floor was constantly swept and scrubbed. It was a very bright kitchen in summer, when the sun came in, in a kind of dancing way, through the leaves of the clematis, and the virginia creeper, which had been trained up the divisions of the windows. But I liked it best in winter; when the flames of the wood-fire in the open hearth made the near part of the room look as if it was coloured red; whilst out in the corners there was a kind of goblin darkness, even in the day-time. Sometimes, when it was very cold, I used to beg to have my dinner by the kitchen fire, and then I took a little wooden stool quite inside, under the black walls of the hearth, and sat snugly with my plate in my lap, and the servants turning round to

look at me, and asking if I was comfortable, and trying to entice me out to their table. That was all very happy. I felt myself to be cared for by every one. But, on the day I have mentioned, I had no wish to go to the kitchen hearth, though it was very cold for the spring season. I kept close by Roger in the little parlour, and said nothing; the sight of him made me ready to cry. What he had said about going away came back to me so sadly. He and William sat together after dinner with their pipes, as was their custom. William wished me away, I suppose; for I know that when I took my doll to play with, that I might have an excuse for sitting by Roger's knee, he said sharply, that I must be off to the kitchen, I was only in the way there: and I ran off, half angry, half sorrowful, and told Deborah, the kitchen-girl, that I was come to help her put away the things; but all the time that I was carrying the plates into the scullery, I was watching William and Roger, for I was quite sure that they were talking about something which concerned me.

And so, sure enough, they were. It was a very long conversation; and Deborah, who was rather given to be pert, said to me, that she thought master had forgotten there was any work to be done in the world, he spent so much time over his pipe; but they both came out of the parlour together at last; Roger looking very brimful of something important; and before I could speak, he caught me up in his arms, and said, "Well, Ursie, what do you say? will you go with brother Roger to live at Dene?"

I don't know what I answered, for I scarcely knew what he meant; but my heart seemed to leap up into my mouth for joy, and I kissed him a great many times; and he was in such spirits, he put me on his shoulder (for I was very small, not much bigger than many children of six), and carried me across the room as he used to do; whilst Deborah screamed with fright, and William told him he ought not to make a fool of himself.

I did not understand why we were to live at Dene till a long time afterwards, and then no one told me exactly, but I learnt about it by degrees.

Dene was a gentleman's house lying under the down which rose just behind Sandcombe. The two places could

not have been more than three-quarters of a mile apart; but I had not often been close to Dene, for whenever I went away from the farm, I used almost always to go over the down to Compton, or in the opposite direction along the ridge to Hatton, those being the two villages nearest to us.

The family at Dene were only there every now and then, and we had nothing to do with them, for they kept cows, and poultry, and pigs for themselves, and we sent all ours to the market at Hove.

But just at this time, it seemed, Mr. Weir wanted to make some change in the place, and had an idea that it would be a good thing to have a respectable head man living there, who might look after the cottages belonging to the estate, and also superintend things about the grounds; and searching about for such a person, he heard of Roger, and made him the offer of going there.

It was not quite to Roger's taste. He had been used to a farm, and to more freedom in his ways. Though William often spoke out to him when he was angry, it was not like having a master over him. He could answer again, if he liked it: not that he ever did; but there is a comfort—I have found it myself—in feeling that one might answer if one chose. Now Mr. Weir had the character of being a stern, fidgety man, and Roger was likely to have a good deal of trouble, and perhaps not to please him after all; though, if he could not, I don't know who could. But then, on the other hand, there was no risk. He would have a fixed sum, and a house to live in, and a home for me. That told with him more than all the rest. He would be able to keep a girl to look after me, and I might be taught to read, and write, and cipher, at Compton School, and he would have me always with him. It might not have been a very wise reason for Roger's choice. Perhaps it would have been better for me to have been sent to people who could have kept me more strictly; but I suppose there was something in the feel of my arms round his neck, and the many kisses I gave him, which touched him, and made him think, as he said, that God had given me to him, and he could not part with me. I have felt in that way myself in after years, when a child has seemed to love me very much. People say it is a woman's

weakness, but I think men have it oftener than they choose to own.

What went on after that I do not at all recollect, though I know it seemed to take a long time to settle everything. William and Roger had a great deal to manage with the farm, and questions about money to arrange. After a good deal of talking, it was decided that some of Roger's money should be left with William to lay out upon the farm, and that he should have good interest for it, and be able to claim it again, after due notice, whenever he wished. It seemed the best plan for the time; and William was very trustworthy. Roger had an additional reason for being prudent, because he was to take charge of me, and he wished to put by my little money for the time when I should be grown up, and keep me himself now out of his own. There was no actual right in the matter, not what the world calls right; yet I have always felt that the fair way would have been for William to have helped. But he never said anything; he seemed to take it for granted that Roger would manage it all comfortably. He had a fashion of letting his own share of a burden fall upon another person's shoulders, and never appearing to think that he was bound to assist in carrying it. And because he kept so aloof, people imagined at last that he had nothing to do with it. I don't think it ever entered Roger's head that he was undertaking more than his share in paying all my expenses; and I am sure that William never thought himself anything but a most excellent brother.

CHAPTER II.

We walked over to Dene late one bright summer's evening, about two months after the plan had been first talked about. I just remember that. I don't recollect what the country looked like; but it must have been very beautiful if it at all resembled—as of course it did—what I have known it since.

The down behind Sandcombe is a long ridge, as I have said; but towards the south it rises up in a great hill, called St. Anne's Hill, from the summit of which there is a view

for many miles round, over the land and over the sea; for it is very near the sea, not above a mile distant. The coast forms part of a great bay, indented by smaller ones. The shore is closed in with red sand-cliffs, rather low, broken, and jagged; but away to the west the red sand changes into chalk, and the cliffs become very steep, and rise to a great height; standing out against the sky, when the sun shines on them, until they almost dazzle the eye; and at other times covering themselves, as it were, with a blueish veil of mist, and looking out proudly from behind it. I always liked the white cliffs very much, yet my eye never rested upon them long, but wandered still further, to a distant stretch of grey land, looking like a cloud, which could be seen just where the sea and the sky met. It was an island very far off. The shepherds on the down, I have been told, often watch it to see whether it is clear or misty. Whenever it is seen quite plainly, they say there is to be a change of weather. That was not my reason for gazing upon it as a child; but it was a spot which I could not reach, or hope to reach, and I had notions of a life there which should be quite apart from trouble or care, and in which I should have the rule, and make every one happy; and so it was the land of my day-dreams.

Below the ridge of Sandcombe Down the ground is very flat for a long way. From the edge of the cliff it is level for miles, cut up into corn-fields and pastures, with a few trees dotting the hedge-rows. People have said that it is a barren-looking country, and wanted wood; but it was never barren to me. There was always variety in it. The clouds, when they drifted over the sky, cast shadows upon the fields; and the sun, when it burst out, gleamed across them in long streaks of light; and sometimes touched the tower of a church, or seemed as if it were trying to light up the old castle, standing on the hill close to Hove. For we could see as far as Hove, and beyond it, from Sandcombe Down: away, indeed, to where the river, which had its source close to us, and was then only a tiny brook, became quite a broad stream, and deep enough to float vessels. We could follow it till it reached a little seaport a few miles from Hove, and trace beyond it a blue line of sea, appearing here and there, as the land rose or sunk. There was an opposite coast, too,

in that direction, and we could plainly distinguish the houses, looking like white dots, and the great chalk-pits, like patches on the sides of the misty hills. I was never tired of the view; yet it was not so grand as the open sea, and the white cliffs from St. Anne's; and I think it gave me more thoughts of the world. It made me picture to myself men, and women, and all their cares and troubles, and hopes for things which belong to earth; but the sea seemed to have come at once from God, and to belong to Him alone. When human beings passed over it, they left no mark behind them. One view was like Time and the other like Eternity. In former days there had been a little chapel on St. Anne's Hill; an oratory, I believe, it was called. It was connected with some old ruins in Compton village, which are now built into barns and granaries, belonging to the Abbey Farm. I have been told that some one of the monks who lived in the abbey, used, in old times, to be sent to the chapel on St. Anne's to say prayers, and to put lights in the tower as a warning to the vessels when they came too close to the shore. In after years a regular light-house was built there, but it has fallen quite into decay. It was not worth while to keep it up, for thick mists from the sea often rest upon the Hill, and in the stormy night the gleam from the light-house could seldom be seen. Only the stones scattered upon the green turf, and a portion of the lower walls, remain; and a gooseberry-bush, which grew in the little garden belonging to the light-house, is the sole mark that any care had ever been taken to make such a place habitable. But the eight-sided tower of the oratory stands as firm as ever,—the walls dark grey, and brown, and green, where lichens have covered them; whilst the foundation of the chapel can also be traced without difficulty. I have heard people wonder, as they talked about the oratory, what could make any person content to live there; and I have heard them say, too, that there was much evil in the days when it was used, and that we are more enlightened. I dare say they are right. I am very thankful for the blessings granted me, and I would not, for all the world, go back to times when I could not read my Bible for myself; but I can never think that the watchers in the oratory kept less guard upon their lights, because they knelt by them and

said their prayers; and I have myself rested against the wall, on the steep side looking over to the sea, and prayed with a deeper feeling, because I felt that the spot was like a church, and had been made holy by the devotion of those who stood there before me.

But I must not linger so long describing Sandcombe Down, and the view from St. Anne's, only they are mixed up with so many things which happened in my childhood, that it is a pleasure to me. The evening that I walked over to Dene with Roger, we turned quite away from St. Anne's Hill, and went to the other end of the long ridge, towards the north. That, too, was a marked spot, for a stone pillar had been placed upon it to note the visit of a foreign emperor to England. I had sometimes been as far as the pillar when I went over the ridge to Compton, or came back from it; but I was always stopped there by Mr. Weir's grounds; for just above Dene the side of the down was very steep, and formed a deep hollow, which Mr. Weir had planted thickly, making winding walks among the trees, and separating the plantation from the down by a light iron fence.

A broad, smooth, sloping path, cut along the side of the hill, in the green turf, was the nearest way from Sandcombe Farm to Dene. Furze and beautiful red foxgloves grew there in plenty; their look, and something in their scent, will often come before me even now, and make me feel as if there must be something young in me which can never die. Perhaps it belongs to that part of myself which is to live again in Heaven. This path went very gradually down the side of the hill, and then a white gate gave admittance to the grounds of Dene, and to a broad road at the foot of the plantations, which led by the back of the house to the entrance.

Other things have become clouded in my memory, but I can quite remember my feelings as Roger opened the white gate, and said, "Now, little one, we are at home." I had a fancy that the whole place belonged to us, that we were in some way raised in the world, and yet I looked round with a grave wonder, and kept close to Roger's side, fearful that I might be trespassing if I went a step to the right or the left. The word trespass was a very awful one to me. I had seen it set up on boards in Mr. Weir's plantations, and it was

mixed up in my mind with visions of a dismal dungeon, and bread and water.

Roger went up to the house-door and rang at the bell. A girl answered it, and then there came out a stout old lady, dressed in black silk, with a very gay cap on her head: as grand as a queen she seemed to me. She patted me on the shoulder, and spoke civilly to Roger. He went aside with her, and they talked for some minutes. I thought at first she must be Mrs. Weir herself, but as we turned away to go a little farther down the carriage-road, Roger told me that she was Mrs. Mason, the housekeeper, who had the care of everything in the house, as he was to have the charge of everything out of it. I found afterwards that Mrs. Mason lived there, more that she might have a home, being an old servant of the family, than for any other reason.

The stables were very near the house, on the opposite side of the carriage-road. They, and the coach-house, and a kind of barn, in which things could be stored away, being all built of good stone, formed quite a grand set of buildings. There was a large clock over the coach-house,—very much needed, for Dene was a most out of the way place. Compton was three miles off by the road, though only a mile and a half by the cart-track over the hill; and that was only a village. It had no shops nor anything of that kind. The nearest gentleman's house must have been four or five miles distant from Dene; whilst Hove, which was the only place we could get anything from, was seven miles off: so there was great need of the clock to keep us all regular and punctual.

Next to the coach-house, joining it indeed, but nearer to the house, a set of rooms had been built, and these we were to have. I cannot say they were anything very grand. Certainly they were nothing like the farm-kitchen at Sandcombe. They did not look as if they belonged to a regular house; and I could not understand what Roger meant when he opened the door, and went into the little kitchen, and sat down in an arm-chair, looking round him half sad and half pleased. I asked him where we were to go next.

"No further, Ursie; this is home. We'll be very jolly here, little Trot." And then he took me upon his knee, and covered me with kisses. I don't think he liked me to see his

face. He must have thought a good deal of Sandcombe, and my father and mother, and old times, and it was very solitary for him. I was no companion, though he did love me so dearly.

The next day a girl was to come to look after me, but there had been some mistake about the time, and she was not there to meet us. Because of this we were to go over to the house and have our tea with Mrs. Mason. So when Roger had unpacked some of the things, and I had tired myself with running up and down the steep flight of stairs to look at the bedrooms, we went across to the house. I should say first, however, that we had a very comfortable lodging upon the whole. Besides a tidy parlor, a kitchen, and two bed-rooms, and a closet in which another bed could be put, there was a little room within the kitchen, where a servant might sleep if it were necessary. But the plan was for the girl to come for the day only, as she lived at a cottage quite close ; so the kitchen room was only likely to be used as a place for lumber.

Neither water nor soap had been provided for us, and we went across to the house just as we were when we came from our walk. I did not think of such things, but Roger did. He was wonderfully neat in his ways for a man who had so much rough work to attend to. He resembled my mother, who was famed for tidiness and cleanliness. I dare say, too, he knew what Mrs. Mason would like, for we were no sooner inside the house, than she took me up-stairs to her bed-room, a very comfortable one, near the kitchen, and made me put myself to rights, and wash my hands and face before we went down to tea.

We had our tea in the kitchen. Mrs. Mason had a little sitting-room to herself, but it was very small, and so, indeed, was the house, though it appeared grand enough to me just at first. Mr. Weir only used it for a few months in the autumn, when he came for shooting, and there were not many contrivances for comfort in it, and very little space for servants. But I knew nothing about such matters that first night, and only felt it to be very strange and pleasant to be sitting by Roger's side, eating lard cake, drinking tea out of pretty brown cups with gilt edges, and able to watch Mrs. Mason, as she sat be-

fore the tea-board, in her black silk dress, looking grander than ever.

Roger and Mrs. Mason talked about a great many things which I did not understand, and their tea lasted much longer than mine; but when I was tired of sitting up and listening, they let me get down by the hearth, and play with a tabby kitten, and Mrs. Mason made the girl bring a cork and a string, and tempt the kitten to run after it. I did not remark anything that went on, till I heard Roger say, "I never knew that both the ladies were coming." That made me attend. I don't know why. I could not think who the ladies were, and I was always rather curious. Mrs. Mason looked grave and odd, and answered, "Yes, both of them. Miss Milicent used to say she didn't like the place, but she has turned quite round now. She's a queer one. You may thank your stars, Mr. Grant, that you are not likely to have anything to do with her."

I think Roger must have noticed my eyes fixed upon him, for he stopped suddenly as he was about to reply, and said, "It is nearly the little woman's bed-time."

"Ah! yes, to be sure;" and Mrs. Mason called me to her and asked if I was sleepy.

"No," I said quickly: "Why does that Miss come here?" A fit of laughter followed, and something was muttered about "little pitchers and long ears;" but I was not to be daunted, and I asked again, "Why does that Miss come here?"

"Because it's her home," said Roger very gravely; "but little children must never trouble themselves with what doesn't concern them:" and I asked no more, for his look showed me he was not pleased. He said I must go over to the cottage to sleep; but Mrs. Mason interfered. No one was there to put me to bed, she said, and nothing was ready for me; she could not be sure even that there were sheets in the bed; for Fanny (that was the name of the girl who opened the door for us) had been so busy, there had not been time for her to go across and see about it. It would be much better for me to sleep at the house; there was plenty of spare room.

Roger objected because of the trouble, but he was soon

overruled. Mrs. Mason liked children, and was very good-natured; so she called Fanny, and told her to take me up to the little back-room and put me to bed.

"Miss Milicent's room, Ma'am, did you say?" asked Fanny, who was rather deaf.

"Miss Milicent's room, child! What are you thinking of? The little back-room—the peacock room. You know what I mean. Miss Milicent's room indeed!" I heard her murmur to herself; "there would be a fuss!"

Fanny carried me off to bed. I whispered to Roger, as I said good night, "Please come and see me after I'm in bed." He was going to say no; I suppose he thought he had no business to go about the house as if it was his own; but Mrs. Mason promised me he should, and I went away happy. Roger's last charge being that I should remember to say my prayers properly; and then he would hear me repeat my verse before I went to sleep.

Fanny took me through a short passage into a little hall, then up some narrow winding stairs to a lobby, with several rooms opening into it. The first on the right hand side was the peacock room.

It never entered my head to ask why it was so called; but, full of my curiosity, I chattered away to Fanny about Miss Milicent all the time I was undressing.

I learnt that she was Mr. Weir's daughter, which sounded strange to me, for I thought that Milicent was a surname; but I found afterwards that she was called Miss Milicent because there was a cousin who had more right to be Miss Weir.

I was informed also that she had a mother but no brothers or sisters. Miss Weir, the cousin, Fanny said, sometimes came to Dene, but not often. This cousin I cared very little about, especially when I heard that she was not expected now, and might never come again, as she was engaged to be married to a Mr. Temple; but I made Fanny tell me what kind of person Miss Milicent was, and when she said "grumpy," I was nearly as much in the dark as before. I only guessed it was something disagreeable; and I mixed up Mr. and Mrs. Weir, and their daughter together, and fancied them all like the ogres I had read of in fairy tales.

I should have been frightened and unhappy, only I was sure that Roger was a match for them all.

He came to me as he had promised, and I repeated my verse to him, and then he kissed me and said, "God bless you, my little Ursie," and left me. I listened to his heavy tread as he went down the stairs: and when all was silent I turned and tossed in the large bed, not daring to open my eyes lest I should see the darkness, and wishing very much that I had been allowed to sleep in the little room at the cottage close to Roger. But I fell asleep at last.

A strange noise woke me very early in the morning; a harsh, scrooping sound, which amused, and yet a little frightened me, and made me sit up in my bed to listen. When I could not understand where it came from, I jumped up and ran to the window to look out. A light fence of trellis-work was just below,—a screen for a little area in front of the pantry,—and on this trellis-work roosted a peacock and peahen. My delight! how can I possibly express it! There they sat, the peacock proudly turning his beautiful purple neck on all sides, and his long tail, spotted with glittering eyes, drooping over the fence; and the peahen looking so quiet and gentle, and beautiful too, only seeming not to wish to be noticed because she had such a grand companion. I believe I screamed with delight, I was told so afterwards; and Fanny always declared that I begged to be allowed to open the window, and pull only one feather out of the peacocks tail, for he had so many I was sure he would never miss it. I know myself that the peacock and peahen seemed like the fairies of the place to me then and for years afterwards; and even now, if I could have money to throw away upon fancies, I should be tempted to have some always with me, in the hope that they might bring back the feelings of unbounded gladness which are, by this time, almost forgotten.

It was a sunshiny morning the first day at Dene. Roger went out directly after breakfast to his business of looking after things, and I was left with Mrs. Mason and Fanny. For that one day I was to run about and do as I chose; but Mrs. Mason put on a grave face as she said that idleness was not good for little girls; and it was settled that Roger

was to take me over to Compton the very first day he could spare the time, in order that I might have my name put down for the school.

Mrs. Mason made me help Fanny wash up the tea-things when breakfast was over; and then she said we might go round the garden, only Fanny was to take particular care that I did not tumble into the pond. So Fanny and I went forth together, first, however, running all over the house, and peeping into every nook and corner, even into Miss Milicent's room, which was nothing remarkably different from any other, except that it was the largest and had the prettiest view. Fanny said that Miss Milicent always had the large room because of her boxes.

The house at Dene had been first a labourer's cottage; that was before Mr. Weir took a fancy to come there for shooting. He built two rooms, a dining-room and a drawing-room, not at all large, and rather square, only with a kind of bow for the window. These rooms were on each side of the little passage or hall, and there were no more sitting-rooms in the house, at least when first we went there. Miss Milicent's room was over the drawing-room, and Mr. Weir's over the dining-room; and there was another room, which was used as a dressing-room, besides the peacock room and some attics: that was all the house then, except the chambers over the kitchen, where Mrs. Mason and Fanny slept. The attics were what I liked best; we had to go up such a droll little staircase to reach them, and they had such a beautiful paper, a kind of Chinese pattern, with a bridge and some houses, and little men and women going over the bridge. They, too, like the peacock, were part of the fairy things belonging to Dene, and I seemed to have more to do with them than with Mr. Weir and Miss Milicent. The attics opened upon the leads of the house, and the peacock had been up there and left behind him one of his small feathers,—not one with an eye, but with a soft feathery fringe,—such a purple green! there is no colour like it elsewhere that I have seen. Fanny crept out of the window and brought it back to me, and I have it now. Unless it was a duty, I would not part with it for any sum of money.

Going over the house was very pleasant, but it was noth-

ing to the garden; and when Fanny opened the front door, I rushed out wild with delight, and scarcely heeding her as she called to me, in a frightened voice, not on any account to run so fast, or I should be in the pond.

Dene stood very high. The ground sloped directly from the house, but there was a broad pavement in front, covered by an open verandah, which had been made by a very old man, a country carpenter, and was esteemed quite a wonder, for its pretty patterns and crossings. The house would have been homely-looking on the outside, except for the verandah; but that gave it a look unlike other places, and the arches made a separate frame for each portion of the country that was to be seen from it.

The view from the house, like that from the down, might, I suppose, have been called wanting in wood; but Paradise could scarcely have been more lovely to Eve, when she first opened her eyes upon it, than Dene was to me on that summer morning, and many, many others which followed. It looked to the east, and the sun, therefore, shone full upon it. The turf was smooth as a carpet of velvet, and not a weed was to be seen in the bright flower-beds. In the centre of the lawn, a fountain, which the gardener set playing to please me, rose up like a silver thread into the air, and in the pond round the fountain, bright gold-fish floated about, catching at the bread-crumbs with which I was allowed to feed them. Another pond, with an island in the centre, and a walk round it, was to be seen still lower, but it was always a place of mystery to me. I never reached the island, though I always longed to do so. Beyond the garden lay an expanse of country, such as could be seen from the down. It had one or two market spots, an old manor farm, surrounded by trees nearly opposite to Dene, and a church on a bit of rising ground, and a zigzag road across a moor,—part of the high road to Hove; and immediately opposite was a ridge of hills, very like Sandcombe Down, with what was called a semaphore at the top. I believe it was used for making signals about ships to persons a good way off. It was a view in which there seemed always something new to find out; and especially I used to please myself on Saturdays, when Roger was gone to Hove, by watching the carts and waggons, and horses

moving like dots over the zigzag road, and guessing which might belong to him. But that is going on beyond my first morning.

Fanny led me all round the garden, and then, as we came back, she stopped at the foot of a steep bank covered with shrubs, which parted the grounds of Dene from the down, and pointing to a flight of rough steps, said, I might go up there if I liked. I ran before her, scarcely contented to make use of the steps, but every now and then scrambling up the bank, till I reached the top; and there I found a seat, and a little wicket gate, opening upon the carriage road close to the down. Crossing the road, Fanny made me enter the plantation, which, as I before said, filled the hollow of the hill behind the house. We went on and on, along narrow winding paths, sometimes stopping to rest upon a bench under a tree, sometimes going quite to the edge of the bank, to look down through the mass of branches, and leaves, and flowers, which seemed to sparkle like emerald and silver, upon a green field just at the bottom of the plantation, in which Mr. Weir's cows were feeding; and then we ran on again till we came to a little summer-house; a real house, with a table, and some wooden chairs, and a tiny fire-place; so cool and pleasant-looking it was!—but we could not go in, for Mrs. Mason kept the key, but Fanny lifted me up that I might peep in at the window.

It was all more happy to me far than words can tell, but I can never by description make other people feel the same. Fanny, though she was not much more than a child, seemed to care little about it. All that she appeared to think of then, or afterwards, was the gossip about the few people who lived in the neighborhood. We passed out of the plantation by clambering over an iron fence, and came round to the house in a different direction, across an open bit of pasture land, which seemed once to have formed part of the down. There it was that Fanny was induced to stop, that she might point out the cottage in which Sarah's father and mother lived. Sarah was the girl who was to take care of me and cook our dinner, and make our beds. They were labouring people, she said, and they were very glad to get Sarah a place. Sarah was to have gone to the gamekeeper's, but his

wife had a cousin who was come to help. And then she led me a few steps on, that I might look at the gamekeeper's nice cottage with its strip of garden so neatly kept. The gamekeeper's wife, she said, had had some tiffs with Miss Milicent, but that was no wonder. Fanny did not think proper, however, to tell me what the tiffs were about, but wandered off to another subject, saying, that she must take me home, for she had to run down to Longside Farm to get some eggs for Mrs. Mason. The people at Longside were very well to do in the world, she informed me; Farmer Kemp, folks declared, was worth a mint of money; and he was very careful, not at all like the Shaws, who lived at the Manor Farm, called White Hill, which we had seen from the garden. The Shaws were very set-up people, and laughed at the Kemps, and the Kemps had given up visiting them.

A good deal of this I knew before, and very little I cared for it. Yet I cannot help noting it now. It was the beginning of a long tale, and I think of it as I think of the little stream that welled forth from the plantation behind the house, and after being caught in a stone basin, where it sparkled clear and bright, made its way, stealing by fields, and through ditches, till it became a broad river, with which mud and shingle and all impurity had mingled. Nothing but the sea could cleanse that stream, and nothing but the ocean of God's Redeeming Love can cleanse the foulnesses that even the best must contract as their life flows forth to Eternity.

CHAPTER III.

It would be useless to attempt a description of all that happened when we first went to live at Dene, and I have put into the account of that morning's walk over the grounds nearly all there is to say about the place, and added some things which fitly ought to have come in further on. But I write just as the thoughts enter my head, and should not be

able to get on at all, where there is so much to say, if I were to take too much time to consider.

We settled ourselves into our little house—Roger and I—and Sarah came as it had been agreed, and two days afterwards Roger took me over to Compton to the clergyman there, and arranged that I was to go to the village school. Sarah had a sister, about twelve years old, who went, and she was to take care of me. I know some people thought it strange that I should be sent to mix with everybody's children, and declared that my father and mother would never have allowed it if they had been living. But William and Roger both knew what my parents would have wished better than the world did, and Roger has often told me that the things he heard about the schools in Hove made him very unwilling to place me at one. He wanted me, he said, to grow up useful, and to know my place in the world, and from what he could see of the girls who had gone to those boarding-schools, it was just what they had never been taught. They were always trying to get out of their place. It took a good many years, and a good deal of experience too, to enable me to understand entirely all that Roger meant by that. As for my own wish, I was so glad to escape being sent away from Roger, that I would have borne real suffering rather than be sent to a boarding-school in Hove. And I was quite happy at Compton, every one was very kind to me. The clergyman came to see us and instruct us himself, and I was taught to read, and write, and cypher, and do needlework, in a way which has been an advantage to me all my life, and—much more than that—I was made to look upon religion as the one thing to be considered above all others. That is the best lesson any one can acquire; all others are easy afterwards; and I thank God that He placed me so early under the care of those who had learned it themselves, and so were well able to teach it to me.

I had some weeks at school, and then came harvest time and holidays, when Mrs. Mason gave me employment at home, and when I was allowed to enjoy myself by taking a book up to the seat on the top of the bank, and sitting there all alone by myself, reading or listening to the chirp of the grasshoppers, and the songs of the birds in the plantation. I

liked that seat better than any other, partly, I believe, because no one else seemed ever to think about it; but there was a pleasure too in being close to the down, feeling that I might, if I chose (though I never really wished to do so), wander all over it, and even go across St. Anne's hill, to the great cliffs above the sea-shore, and there find a vessel to carry me all over the world. I had many fancies of that kind from the books I read. Reading was quite my snare; I did so delight in it, and so I do to this day. When Mrs. Mason gave me work to do, I used to carry it to the upper seat, fully meaning to do it, but if I had a book at my side, I spent more minutes than I ought in looking into it between whiles. Some books I had from the school-library at Compton, and Mrs. Mason let me have some old magazines, which I was never tired of, though I knew most of the stories nearly by heart.

September came, and I went to school again; and just about that time there was a bustle at Dene; putting the garden in order, and cleaning out the rooms, and arranging the furniture, because Mr. and Mrs. Weir, and Miss Milicent, were expected for two months.

A grand time it seemed to be for Mrs. Mason and Fanny. As for me, I cried terribly, because I thought the family would take possession of the garden, and the plantation, and all the places I liked, and that I should never be able to go near them. I complained to Roger, but he would not encourage me in such nonsense. He said that if I was a good child, I should never want pleasures, and if I was a naughty one, I should not deserve them.

It was Saturday afternoon, so I had not been to school; but I sat in the kitchen mending my clean things, which had just come from the wash, and Sarah was busy sweeping up, and putting things in order for Sunday. We heard a carriage come up the road, and I jumped up and said, "Here's Mrs. Weir," and Sarah ran to the door, and stood there with the broom in her hand. We had not heard for certain that they would come on that day. There was a chance that they might have stopped till Monday;—but we were sure it could be no one else, because, although there was a right of footway through the grounds, no carriages had any

business along our road, and nothing with wheels ever came by it, unless it might be every now and then Mr. Weir's light cart, going over the hill to Compton or Hatton.

The carriage stopped. It was closed, so that we could not see who was within. Mrs. Mason and Fanny came out in a great hurry, and made many curtsies; and then the footman (there was a grand footman, dressed in a drab-coloured coat, with red trimming, and a coachman like him, only stouter) opened the door, and an elderly gentleman got out, and walked straight into the house, with his chin up in the air, not stopping to speak to any one. I noticed nothing about him but his nose—and somehow, whenever I looked at him afterwards, that was the only feature which ever caught my eye. It seemed to have a way of speaking, as most people's eyes speak. A lady followed; very upright and well-formed she was, but so small—she might have been taken for a child, when one only looked at her back. She had a sweet face, though it was very sallow and sickly; and her bonnet was made in an old-fashioned way, to come over her forehead and protect her eyes, which seemed very weak. Mrs. Mason helped her out of the carriage herself, putting an arm round her for support, and then the lady shook her so heartily by the hand, it was quite pleasant to see; and she patted Fanny gently on the shoulder, and I think asked some questions about Roger, as I saw her turn round and look towards the cottage. Mrs. Mason must have said something to please her, for she nodded her head slowly, several times, as if she was quite satisfied. She seemed willing to stay and talk more, but Mrs. Mason prevented her, and went with her into the house, just as I saw a large foot, with a boot like a man's, protrude from the carriage. The footman stood back, and so did Fanny and the coachman; it seemed as if they could not make room enough for what was coming. Yet it was not such a very large body; when Miss Milicent stood upon the ground, she was scarcely more than five feet six, and stout in proportion; but the very way in which she put her head into the carriage, and out again, and called the footman, and tossed a parcel to Fanny, and gave an order to the coachman, all, as it were, in one breath, made one feel at once as though the world was not

big enough for her. It was some seconds before I quite determined what she was like. She must have had a great fancy to be a man, for certainly she had taken pains enough to make herself look as like one as a woman's dress will allow. She had on a stuff gown, made very short, and a loose black jacket, with no white collar, nor anything of that kind to make it pretty; only a red handkerchief tied round her neck. Besides, she wore a black straw bonnet, with a plain white border in the inside, and not a bit of ribbon or flower. Her face was like Mr. Weir's, only smaller, and without quite such a nose; but she had eyes to make up for it, so sharp, they were in constant motion, and they danced about as though they had a life of their own, quite independent of Miss Milicent herself, and were determined to see everything there was to be seen in this world.

I thought the trunks would never come to an end. The coachman wanted to carry some of them into the house, but Miss Milicent would have them all taken from the carriage first. She kept every one waiting upon her, and I could not help fancying she took a pleasure in occupying just double the time needed. But the business was finished at last, and Miss Milicent was able then to stop and speak to Fanny, which she did in the same sort of way as I have seen a lawyer question a witness in a court of justice. Fanny curtsied at every answer, but she would fain have run away, I am sure, and she did after a while move to one side, as a kind of hint to Miss Milicent to go in-doors. But instead of that, what should we see but Miss Milicent coming across the road to the cottage! Sarah threw down the broom, and ran off to hide herself in one of the out-houses; I thought it mean to follow her, and I did not see what cause I had to be afraid of Miss Milicent, or of any one, if I was not doing anything wrong; so I went back to my seat to finish darning my stocking, but I own my heart beat rather fast.

In she came, without knocking at the door, and I felt quite affronted, and just for a moment could not make up my mind to rise from my seat. She caught me up for it directly. "Little girls ought to learn to be civil," she said, "when ladies take the trouble to come and see them! What are you about there? Mending your stockings? Very good

work, but you don't do it properly. You should draw the stitches together first." To my dismay, she took a pair of scissors, cut a little hole deliberately in my Sunday stocking, and then, catching the needle from my hand, unthreading it in her haste, sat down to show me how to bring the edges together again. I was so angry, I could have pricked her fingers with my needle when I gave it back to her threaded. I am nearly sure I gave it a little poke with that intention, but she did not seem to feel it, and, taking up the stocking, made me come quite close to watch her, whilst she went on talking all the time. "Who taught you to work? You ought to know better. How old are you? Nine and a half?—you don't look more than six. You can't have had any pains taken with you. Now attend, do you see? first one stitch, then the other,—drawn together closely; that makes the hole smaller. You must darn it over afterwards. I shall make them teach darning in that way at Compton school. Don't forget! I shall come and see you again, and find out if you have attended to what I say. If you are a good child, I shall give you some of my stockings to mend. Now get up and open the door; you always ought to open the door for ladies. They don't teach you at all good manners at Compton school; I shall see about it."

See about it!—yes. I felt, indeed, that she would see about it, and so should I. I opened the door for her because she stood waiting for me to do it, but I closed it behind her instantly, and rushing back to my stocking, tore out all the stitches she had put in, and tossed the stocking across the room.

Sarah came back and saw me kicking my feet against a chair to vent my rage. She laughed, which made me still more angry. I began to scold because she had gone away and left me. "The tiresome woman wouldn't have dared cut a hole in my stocking," I said, "if you had been here;" and I ran to the other end of the room, caught up the stocking, and thrust my finger through the hole, making it half as large again, and when Sarah still would do nothing but laugh, I leaned my head upon the table, and fairly cried with temper and vexation.

Roger entered just at that moment. When he saw me in tears, he came up to me in his kind way and took me upon

his knee; but he could get nothing from me except that Miss Milicent had been to see me, and cut a hole in my stocking, and I hated her, and if she lived at Dene I should run away.

He must have been very much puzzled, but he knew pretty well what I was like when I was in what William used to call one of my tantrums; so instead of trying to talk to me, he just said, "My little Trot will be better upstairs for a while;" and then he took me up in his arms and carried me to my room, and shut the door and left me.

I was not sulky,—that was never part of my disposition, —only terribly passionate. I stamped and screamed a good deal at first, but no one came near me, and at last I went to the window, and had my thoughts turned by watching the servants finishing the unpacking of the carriage, and by the time Roger came back I was quite quiet, and sorry for having been so naughty, and he took me down-stairs again.

We sat down to tea, and after a little while Roger began asking me again about Miss Milicent. I was not angry with him as I was with Sarah when he laughed as I told my grievance. Roger often laughed at things which other people cry about, but I told him he wouldn't have liked it if it had been his stocking, and he had had to darn it.

"I should not have liked it, Ursie, may be, but I would have taken it as it was meant."

"It was meant to tease me," I said, and I felt my face quite red again.

Roger made no answer. I saw he was vexed, and I put down my bread and butter, and threw my arms round his neck, and called him "dear Father Roger."

That always softened him. He gave me a great hug in return, but still he did not speak, till I touched him and asked him what he was thinking about.

"Nothing, Trot, that you can understand now; but it wouldn't be such a hard world to live in, if people looked more at what is meant, and less at what is done."

He was very silent after that, as was his wont, and when tea was over he went out again, and I took up my stocking and tried to mend it in Miss Milicent's fashion, feeling somehow, from what Roger had said, that I had been hard upon her.

CHAPTER IV.

Sunday was the pleasantest day in the week to me. Roger walked with me over the down quite early, and left me at the Sunday-school, and went himself to see an old aunt, my mother's sister, who was very infirm and could never go out; and there he stayed till church-time. I sat with the school-children in church; but Roger's seat was very near, and I could see him, whenever I looked up, with his eyes upon his book, and that made me look upon mine. Otherwise there was a good deal to teach one to be inattentive: the boys sat close to us, and were very troublesome; slyly pulling at each other's books, and whispering, and then the master would reach over into the middle of them with his stick, and give a sharp tap, which just as likely touched the good ones as the bad. The girls were not any better than the boys. I was often tapped myself, though I don't really think I deserved it so much as some of the others. There was such a trouble, too, about repeating the responses. Some would speak out, and some would not; and every now and then, one boy took it into his head to shout; and down came a message from the master, that if he did, he should be caned; then we all grew silent, and there came another message, that if we didn't speak out we should be locked up. It was trying to know how to keep straight amongst it all; but what did me most good was to see Roger standing there, so still, and grave, and earnest-looking, and his face different, in a way, from what it was at other times. It was a very dear face always to me; though his skin was not smooth, and his hair brushed neat like a gentleman's, I often thought I would not change it for the handsomest picture I had ever seen. But on Sundays, in church, another look was given to it, as if all in it that had been gathered from the toil and care of life had been taken away. It came across me one day, when I noticed him just as he rose up from his prayers, that if I were to see him in Heaven, he could scarcely be anything different.

That Sunday we went into church rather more noisily

than usual; Kitty Dove, Sarah's sister, pushed little Johnnie Rowe, and nearly threw him down, and Johnnie pinched Kitty, and made her cry; and some of the bigger girls were whispering about it to the mistress, and begging that Kitty and Johnnie might not sit near each other. But all of a sudden there was a great "Hush!" The girls left off fidgeting, and put their hands in their laps; and the boys began to find out the Psalms in their prayer-books. A sudden fright had taken them all. I peeped out from a back corner in which I was sitting, and saw at the church-door Mrs. Richardson, the vicar's wife, and Miss Richardson, and one or two other ladies who taught in the Sunday-school, and in the middle of them Miss Milicent,—not one whit different from what she was on Saturday night, just the same loose jacket and red handkerchief. The girls glanced round at her, and the corners of their mouths went; but not a word was said. Mrs. Richardson and the other ladies went to their seats; but up came Miss Milicent to us; her eye seemed to take in all at one glance, and half a dozen names were out of her mouth almost in a breath, and in a whisper so loud it could be heard nearly all over the church:—"Mary Webb, how's your mother?" "Fanny Hart, what d'ye mean by coming in that fine bonnet?" "Johnnie, you've got a swelled face, I see; come up to Dene, and you shall have some stuff to do it good." "Jane, who is that little one by you? Your sister? She is too young to come to church; she won't behave well. Mind you all attend. Keep your eyes upon your books; speak out properly. I shall be looking at you. Mrs. Richardson says you are very idle. I shall have an eye upon you." Miss Milicent shook her head fiercely, and turned away; and the moment her back was towards us, and she was out of the hearing of a whisper, such a buzz began as might almost have drowned the clergyman's voice when he commenced the service, but that a loud tap from the stick came down upon the shoulders of the head boy, sounding loudly through the church, and making Miss Milicent thrust her head forward, and shake her hand at us, threatening a still severer and more mysterious punishment. Yes, we were all quiet after that; but I don't think any of us remembered that we were bound to be so because we were in God's Presence.

When we came out of church, Roger met me, and I went with him to speak to William, who always came to Compton now, that he might have a chance of seeing Roger. Before, he had been accustomed sometimes to walk over the hill the other way to Hatton. It was a little farther, but William rather liked making a business of going to church. Roger always kept to one church, and went twice if he could, though at that time it was too far for me; but William never troubled himself about service in the afternoon. He said it was the only time he had for looking over his accounts. I used to fancy that it worried Roger to have to meet William and talk to him just after church. He never said it, but he used to answer rather shortly when William began consulting him about the crops; and that was not at all his way generally. But William was a great talker, and seldom noticed much whether any one was listening to him, as long as he could have his say without interruption.

I was glad to be away from the school-children, for I saw Miss Milicent go up to them again; and I was beginning to have a feeling that wherever she was, a scolding was close behind. We went up the lane by the Abbey Farm, which took us to the foot of the down, and then we scrambled up a steep path which was a shorter way than by the cart-track. Such a very bright Sunday it was! The sky and the sea so blue, and all the country quiet, so as it never is on any other day,—a kind of quietness which seemed as if it would creep into one's heart and live there. How I wished that William would leave off talking about the crops as he did; not letting one be at peace for an instant, but pointing out first this field, and then that, and reckoning how much had been got from each, and complaining—William always complained, when he talked of his crops—that the rent of Sandcombe was so high, it made him much worse off than his neighbours! Roger bore it very patiently; he laughed a little now and then, and said something rather sharp in a good-natured way; but he never lectured William, nor let him see that he wished to get away from him, and so William was very fond of him, and put forth all that was in his mind quite freely.

We were at the top of the down, and there we were to part company. Roger took out his watch, observing he must

hurry home, for there would not be time else for dinner and going to afternoon service. William waited before he replied, and then he said, in a kind of awkward, shy way, "I have some other business in hand for this afternoon." He laughed so oddly that I caught up his words and said, "What business, William? People should not do business, you know, on Sundays."

"You are a prying little body," he answered quickly, though not at all as if he was angry. "Roger, you'll repent it some day, if you don't keep her in better order."

"Miss Milicent will do that," said Roger, and he laughed; "but I should like to know your business myself, William, since you have chosen to mention it."

"Business not lying so very near home," continued William; "taking me over to Hatton perchance."

"Going to church?" I said; "I wish Roger would go to Hatton Church too, and take me with him."

"Something to do with going to church, to be sure," said William, laughing again, as though he had a mystery in his mind. "What do you say, Roger? Do you approve? 'The better day, the better deed,' you know!"

Roger considered, then said, "I would have all things go right with you, William, if I could. But these are not matters for any to interfere in; only I think, if you went to church first, you might be better likely to come to a wise choice."

"I can't go to church at Hatton," said William; "Mr. Fowler preaches in the afternoon; and he's a drawler, and sends me to sleep: it's no good in the world for me to go to church in the afternoon."

"Well, you must take your own way," said Roger. "I only know that I find things go straighter when I put church and such things first, than when I let them come in second; and so I thought it might be with you."

"Men are not like sheep, they don't all run the same way," replied William, rather sulkily. "So you won't give me your good wishes, Roger!"

Roger took his brother's hand, and shook it with a hearty grasp. His heart seemed full, and he turned away, and walked home in silence.

They thought I did not understand, but I did. That sharp woman, Leah Morris, lived at Hatton, and she was going to be my sister-in-law. I asked no questions of Roger, I knew it was a matter that vexed him; but we had dinner as soon as we reached home, and then Roger went to church again. I sat for some time in the window-seat learning my Collect and Psalm for the next Sunday; and then went over to see Mrs. Mason, who was staying at home to let Fanny go to church, and had a game of play with the kitten, and read a story out of one of the school-library magazines, and when it was growing rather late, walked up to the top of the down to meet Roger coming back from church. After that I helped Sarah get tea ready: we always had it in the parlour, and as there was no hurry for work, we were a long time at it. I talked to Roger about school, and what I learnt, and how I liked the little boys and girls; and when we had finished, and Sarah was washing up the tea-things in the kitchen, Roger brought out a large Bible with pictures for me to look at, and soon after that it was bed-time. I was very happy, but I had not forgotten all the while that Leah Morris was to be my sister-in-law.

CHAPTER V.

I did not see Miss Milicent again till Monday evening, when I came back from school, for I went away early to be at Compton at nine o'clock, and always took my dinner with me to avoid the long walk in the middle of the day.

She was at the door talking to Roger when I reached home, and I hoped she did not notice me at first. Her tongue was going so fast about fences and ditches: I believe she thought she knew as much about them as Roger did. I passed her and went indoors, and had just taken off my bonnet and begun to learn my lessons for the next day, when wide open went the door, and in she came by herself. "So," she said, "little body, how did you manage your work on Saturday?" It was not an ill-natured voice after all, and

Roger's words were remembered; so I answered, as civilly as I could, "that I had tried to do it right."

"Very good; let me see. Did you wear the stockings yesterday? have you got them on to-day?" Before I could speak again, she had caught up my foot, and pulled off my shoe to look. Couldn't I have kicked her! I wonder I didn't; but I sat quiet, not trusting myself to speak. She spied the hole directly. "Pretty well considering. I shall send you some of my darning for a pattern. Saturday is a holiday; you shall come and work with me on Saturdays. Mrs. Weir wants to see you. Come across with me, I shall take you to her, and there is something to spend in sugar-plums; I suppose you like sugar-plums." She tossed sixpence into my lap, and I believe I said "Thank you." I did not dare return it. I followed her across the road to the house. Her step might have been a giant's stride, and she went straight from one point to another, like an arrow. It seemed as though she would have knocked down a wall if it had come in her way. We went in by the kitchen, and Miss Milicent looked in as we passed to tell the cook to be sure not to let the mutton be over-roasted, and to take care that there were mashed potatoes, browned, for Mr. Weir, and plenty of wine sauce with the pudding. The cook had a very short manner and scarcely answered her. The family dined late, and there was a great smell of the dinner in the passage, which made Miss Milicent grumble a good deal; indeed she had not left off talking about it when we reached the drawing-room door.

"Mother! I have brought Ursie Grant to see you!" That was the way I was introduced, and Miss Milicent gave me a push, which, I suppose, she meant to be gentle, and left me standing shyly in the middle of the room.

Mrs. Weir looked even less, half-buried as she was in her arm-chair, than when I had seen her standing. It was not merely that she was short and thin, but her features were singularly small,—her bones slight, like those of a child, and her hands so white and delicate, it appeared as though the least rough touch would have broken them. She reminded me of what I had read of fairies, and the soft, low voice, which bade me come near and say, "How do you do?" pleas-

ant, and kind though it was, came forth in a slow, precise way, quite different from anything I had ever heard before.

"Ursula is your name, is it not my little dear?" said Mrs. Weir, and she put one of her slender arms round me, and kissed me on the forehead.

"Ursie, they call me, Ma'am," was my answer.

"Ursie, or Ursula, it is a very good name. There has been one Saint Ursula; I trust that you may be another."

I stared at her. She said it as if she certainly believed that it was possible, and even likely, I should be a saint; and my notion of a saint was of some one whose business it was to read the Bible and say prayers all day. I replied, "If you please, Ma'am, Roger says that if I am ever anything, he thinks I shall be a dressmaker."

Mrs. Weir did not laugh,—that was one peculiarity about her,—she took everybody's words just for what they meant. She only answered, "I can explain my meaning when we are better acquainted. Ring the bell, Ursula," and then she took up again the work which she was doing, which was a little cotton frock for a child, and I stood silently by her side, waiting for what was to come next.

Some minutes passed before the bell was answered, and I amused myself in the meantime by looking round the room. It was wonderfully changed from what it had been when the family were away. I could not think where all the pretty things had come from. Such bright covered books there were on the round centre table, and flowers, and a carved paper-knife, and a beautiful little box, inlaid with mother of pearl; and, on another table in the corner, a curious cabinet, with figures of animals in front of each drawer, and some strange figures standing by it with white dresses and copper-coloured faces; Indians I believe they were. The best chintz curtains, too, had been put up, and the striped coverings of the chairs taken off. All looked surprisingly neat and pretty; and the prettiest thing of all was Mrs. Weir's work-table, placed by her arm-chair. It was a tiny table, made in squares of black and yellow wood, and scooped into hollows round the edge, and, on it, stood the loveliest white work-box, lined with blue, and having a row of mother of pearl reels of cotton, and silk winders, with coloured silks beautifully wound,

and a pincushion with the pins placed in rows, as straight as though they had been put in by rule. It was just fitted for Mrs. Weir: scissors, and thimble, and silver bodkin, and smelling bottle, so small and bright, and new-looking; and on the same table was a little china flower-basket, holding a white moss rose, a carnation, and a bit of lilac verbena, with a sprig of myrtle, and a piece of scented geranium. Only one thing in the whole room looked unsuitable, and that was a large work-basket of coloured straw, put down upon the floor by the window, and out of which peeped what I am sure was the heel of a knitted stocking. That could never have belonged to Mrs. Weir.

The footman answered the bell. Mrs. Weir was not in the least impatient because she had been kept waiting so long. She said to him just as gently as when she was speaking to me: "Richard, some ginger wine and sweet cake, if you please;" and Richard went away and returned with a wine decanter and a plate of cake placed on a silver tray.

"Will you pour out a glass of wine, Richard, and hand the cake to little Ursula Grant? It will not do you harm, my child."

I drank off the wine, not at all sure that I liked it, and put down the glass quickly on the tray.

Mrs. Weir slowly raised her eyes: "You are too rapid, Ursula. If you like to take your cake home, you can."

"Thank you, Ma'am," I caught at the permission directly, and looked towards the door.

"You are wishing to go; that is very natural; but you will come and see me again, I hope."

The tone was cordial and kind, and yet it seemed that Mrs. Weir was trying to prevent herself from showing all she felt.

Something came over me which made me say, bluntly, "I shall like to come, Ma'am, but I don't want wine and cake."

"You shall not have them, my child; we shall do better perhaps without."

"Thank you, Ma'am," I said again, as heartily as though she had promised me a present. "I can always come at this time, when I am back from school," I added.

Such a smile came over Mrs. Weir's face; so sweet and yet so sad. I could have found it in my heart to climb up into her lap, as I did into Roger's, when he looked grave, and entreat her to tell me what it meant. But she was too much a stranger for me to venture; and even if I had known her better, I don't think I should have done it. Tears rise quickly, for they are near the surface, and human love can comfort the grief from which they flow; but such a smile as that was from a depth below which God only could reach.

That had been a very short visit to Mrs. Weir, and little enough had been said by either of us; but yet I looked forward to going again. Of course people would say that, in spite of my refusal of the cake and wine, I secretly hoped to have more; but it really was not so. I felt, directly I spoke to Mrs. Weir about it, that she meant what she said, as I meant what I said, and that we should be friends without any things of the kind.

As I was at school nearly all day, there was but little spare time after I returned for anything but learning my lessons, and tea, and talking to Roger, and doing a little needlework before bed time; but I managed during the course of the next week to run over to the house for a few moments, whilst Sarah was trying to make the water boil, and cutting the bread and butter; and each time with the hope of being called into the drawing-room again to see Mrs. Weir. But I kept my wish to myself, for Mrs. Mason was very shut up about the family, and never encouraged me to talk about them; though she was extremely good-natured to me in other ways. It was Saturday, however, before I went again; the family had been at Dene a week then, but it seemed a month to me, the place was so changed; and I had such a feeling of new things and people to care about and think of, though it was so little that I saw of any one.

This time Mrs. Mason took me into the drawing-room with her. I observed that she was very thoughtful about Mrs. Weir, and anxious in her way of talking to her; but it was rather as if she regarded her as a child not able to manage for herself. Mrs. Weir looked better since she came; she had more colour in her cheeks, and Mrs. Mason noticed this with much pleasure, and both of them praised the air

of Dene, and said there was no place like it, in which I quite agreed. I was made to say the hymn I had been learning at school during the week, and then Mrs. Weir said she should like to hear me read. I knew it was tea time, but I was afraid to say it; so Mrs. Mason lighted a wax candle, placed in a beautiful little silver candlestick, for it was growing dark, and I took up the Testament which Mrs. Weir had put into my hand, and turned over the pages to find the Twelfth Chapter of St. Luke, that being what I had been told to read. I had only finished the first three verses when we were interrupted. The step was so loud that, before I looked up, I thought it must be Miss Milicent; but it was Mr. Weir, and I felt very frightened, for it was the first time I had seen him so near. He stalked in and sat himself down in the arm chair without speaking.

"Go on, Ursula," said Mrs. Weir, taking no notice of her husband; but her voice was less firm than it had been a minute before.

Mrs. Mason was going away.

"You had better take the child with you, Mason," said Mr. Weir.

His tone grated upon me like a sharp saw, though it was not rough or unlike that of a gentleman.

"Ursula was only going to read a very few verses, that I might judge how she improves at school," said Mrs. Weir, raising herself up in her chair, and leaning forward eagerly.

"'Much study is a weariness to the flesh,' is it not?" said Mr. Weir, sarcastically.

Mrs. Weir sank back, and folded her hands one upon the other, as she said, "Mason, the little girl may go."

I thought Mr. Weir would have relented; but he sat brooding over his own thoughts, whatever they were. He did not seem to know that I was going till I reached the door: then he called out suddenly, "Grant is your name isn't it, child? What have you to do with William Grant of Sandcombe?"

"He is my brother, Sir," I answered.

"Oh! He wants me to lower his rent for some land because he is going to be married," continued Mr. Weir, addressing his wife. "He is mistaken if he thinks I am likely

to do anything to encourage matrimony." A light, hollow laugh followed the speech.

I did not hear Mrs. Weir's answer, for Mrs. Mason hurried me out of the room.

"Who told Mr. Weir that William is going to be married?" I exclaimed, eagerly, as the door was shut behind us.

"Who but himself?" said Mrs. Mason, laughing. "Didn't you hear Mr. Weir say so?"

"But William didn't tell me," I replied; "and he ought; sisters ought to know before any one; and I don't like Leah Morris; I can't bear her; I hate her."

"Little folks have no right to hate any one," said a loud voice, issuing from the pantry, which we were just at the moment passing. Miss Milicent appeared with her sleeves turned up at the wrist, and a bunch of raisins in her hand. "It will be a very good thing for you, Ursie Grant, to have a sister-in-law to keep you in order. Your brother Roger spoils you, and I have told him so. Mason, there are not raisins enough for dessert; why weren't they sent for from Hove?"

"They were sent for, Miss Milicent," replied Mrs. Mason; "only the carrier is not come back."

"The carrier must manage to be here earlier," continued Miss Milicent. "He stays in the town, drinking; it's a disgrace. Roger Grant goes to Hove every Saturday; I shall get him to bring out the things."

"You won't find that so easy, I am afraid, Miss Milicent," said Mrs. Mason. "As often as not he rides in; and he only goes occasionally, when it is necessary."

"And he has a great many things to bring out for ourselves," I added, proudly.

It provoked me to receive no answer. I hoped I had offended Miss Milicent; but she merely said in an off-hand way, "There will be a change before next Saturday;" and then she closed the pantry door in a hurry, and went back to her employment of putting out the dessert, which she always did herself.

"She does not mean badly," was Mrs. Mason's comment; "but she loves her own way desperately."

Mrs. Mason spoke as though she was saying it to herself;

but I took up the words and replied, "I can't tell what Miss Milicent means, only she is very cross."

"Not so much so as she seems; you will see that by and by, Ursie. And little folks like you should never set up to be pert and contrary."

"She makes it come all up here," I said, and I stood still and pointed to my throat. "I can't keep it down; and I don't think Roger, nor William, nor any of them would wish it. Roger is not made to be a carrier."

Mrs. Mason only laughed; and, encouraged by not being reproved, I ran on much in the same way, encouraging myself by boasting of my own pride, and saying I was not bound to obey Miss Milicent; neither was Roger; and if he was not treated well, he would go away from Dene; and then what would they all do?

"Find some one else in his stead," replied Mrs. Mason, carelessly. "Roger is not every one, you know, child."

Without answering, I let go her hand, rushed across the carriage-road to the cottage, burst open the door, and seeing Roger seated at the tea-table, threw myself upon his neck in a fit of trembling passion.

"Well! Trot! Well! how now? What's amiss? Look up, Ursie;" and Roger patted my head.

But I was not to be so easily smoothed. I poured forth a torrent of indignation against Mrs. Mason, Miss Milicent, Mr. Weir, William, every one; I mixed them all up together, making very little sense; but letting it be seen plainly that I was as full of pride and self-will as a child of my age need be; though I put it all off upon my love for Roger.

The storm was allowed to exhaust itself, and then Roger bade me dry my eyes and go up stairs, and wash my hands and come down again quickly. I did as I was told, feeling in a way that I had been very silly, though I would not have owned it for the world.

Roger usually went out again directly after tea; but this night he sent Sarah into the outhouse, and told her to wash up the tea things there; and then he took me up on his lap, and said, gravely, "I meant to have told Trot that William was going to be married, only she has heard it before."

"I don't care about it," I said gloomily. "But I hate Leah Morris."

"That is said like a very silly little girl," answered Roger; "and it must not be said again." He looked more stern than I had ever seen him.

I drew closer to him, trying to fondle him, but he kept rather aloof.

"William has a right to marry whom he will," he continued; "and if Leah Morris makes him a good wife, there is no one to complain. And I won't have my little Trot speaking as if she knew what was best, when she doesn't and can't know. Yours is a bad temper, Ursie; and it will bring you into trouble.

"I shouldn't care; I don't care for anything; only for you, Roger," I said, more humbly.

"Yes, you do, Ursie; you care for yourself. If you didn't, you would not fret me by putting yourself into these humours."

"It was Miss Milicent," I exclaimed. "I should never have been so cross about William, only she made it all come up in my throat by the way she talked. They don't want us, Roger, not Mr. Weir, nor Miss Milicent, nor any of them; and Mrs. Mason said, that if you went away, they would find some one to put in your place."

"Of course they would," he said, and he laughed; "but I mean to make myself so useful, Ursie, that they sha'n't very easily find one to take my place. That is the true way to go on, if you want people to value you. But it is not the value we put upon one another, but what God puts upon us, that is of consequence," he added, and the Sunday look, which seemed to take him quite away from earth, came over his face.

It did more for me than any talking; and the tears came into my eyes, as I said, "I am a very wicked child, Roger; will God ever make me good?"

"We will say our prayers, both of us, and try," he answered; "that is the sure way. But, Ursie, you must know what to pray about. You like dearly to make every one go your way; that is your fault."

"Yes," I said, and I thought for a moment; "but if I could have things my own way, I would not be like Miss Milicent; I would make every one love me."

"Not so easy that, Trot. I may like my way, and you may like yours; and though your way were ever so good, yet, if it went contrary to mine, I shouldn't be pleased."

"Then you would give up," I said quickly; "because you always do."

He looked very grave. I said again, "You always give up, because you are my own dear brother Roger."

"Maybe I have given up too much already," he said; "I am not so sure, Ursie, that you wouldn't be better living away at school."

I put my hand before his mouth as the words escaped, "You promised—you told me," I exclaimed; but he interrupted me.

"No, Ursie, I did not promise, I said we would try."

"But we have tried, and I am going to be so good, I don't mean to be in a tantrum once again all the next month. Oh! Roger, Roger, I should die if you sent me away." I clung to him, and my tears came very fast, but they were not angry as before.

He soothed me now in his own kind way; but he said I must not talk of dying because I might have to go away from him. Perhaps it would be my duty by and by.

"But you are my brother," I said; "it can't ever be right to go away;—only if you wished it," and I turned to him with a sudden pang at my heart.

"That is not very likely, Ursie; but there are many changes in this world, and it is well to be ready for them."

"But you would not love any one more than me, ever?" I said, and I raised my head, which had been resting on his shoulder, and looked him full in the face.

"Not more, Ursie; no, not more." His tone did not satisfy me.

"And not so much," I added; "no one could come into Ursie's place."

"No one, indeed; little Trot knows she is Roger's darling."

"And I will be your wife. I would rather marry you than any one else," I said.

He only laughed and kissed me.

CHAPTER VI.

How conversations rest in a child's mind, when no one suspects it! There was no reason that what Roger had said that evening should have been remembered particularly, but it was; I fancied it a kind of agreement we had made that we were to be all in all to each other; and I thought that now, when William was going to marry Leah Morris, there was greater cause than ever why Roger and I should love each other. This made me try to please him more, and I kept a stricter watch over my temper, and learned my lessons more carefully, so as to bring home more good marks from school. I had much just then, I must confess, to keep me in good humour. William's marriage was a great event, and in spite of my hatred of Leah Morris, it interested me very much. Besides, Leah was such a grand lady, I had not any notion how grand, till I heard the children at school talking of her. Some of them had relations at Hatton, and they brought all kinds of gossip about her to Compton. The Morrises lived in a farm-house which was only a little smaller than the Abbey Farm at Compton, and Miss Morris, as Leah was always called, had been to school at Hove, and had learnt to play on the piano, and visited the surgeon's wife, and had been known to drink tea at the parsonage. These were distinctions which made the village people look up to her as somebody very much above them; but, I think, what came over them most was the sight of the green bonnet, and the black silk cloak with lace round it, which she wore at Church on Sundays. Such a beautiful bonnet I was told it was, with such smart flowers on the outside; it was much finer than any the vicar's wife ever wore. I don't mean that hearing of these things made me like Leah; I did not find that any one liked her, but I thought it a grand thing to be connected with her; and as I was not going to live with her, it signified little to me then what she was in other ways.

Roger asked for a holiday for me, one Wednesday, when the marriage was quite settled, that I might go over to Sandcombe with him and drink tea, and see Leah, for she and her

mother were to be there. Roger managed all his business earlier on purpose; and I had put on my Sunday frock, and we were just setting off, when a message came, saying that Mrs. Weir wanted to see Roger directly. It was Fanny who gave the message, and as we happened to be standing close by the kitchen door, she told me to go in and wait till Roger came back. I sat down in a chair watching the cook getting the dinner ready, when in came Mr. Weir. "What have you got for dinner?" he said, speaking out quickly. Cook answered that Miss Milicent had ordered a couple of chickens. "They will be over-roasted. I must put off dinner. Come to me for orders, not to Miss Milicent;" and he stalked out of the kitchen, as if he had been too condescending in putting his foot into it.

Such a fuss the cook was in! I never saw anything like it. Jane, the housemaid was in the kitchen, and Cook let out her anger to her. "It was always the case," she said; "not a day passed, but changes were made in that way; she wouldn't stay, that she wouldn't. She never bargained for master's interference. It was worse here than in London; she thought they had come to Dene for a quiet life, but little enough quiet there was like to be with Mr. Weir and Miss Milicent. And if what folks said was true"—and then she nodded her head and winked her eyes to give notice of some great secret.

"It is no great matter to us what folks say, that I can see," replied Jane; "as long as our wages are paid. I don't see what is to trouble us, unless it might be Miss Milicent, and her bark is always worse than her bite."

"I could put up with Miss Milicent," replied the cook. "I would rather any day be scolded than looked at. But he! —it's more than mortal woman can bear. And to see how he treats his poor wife; and she, as they say, quite taken in by him at the beginning."

Jane was a prudent person, and I think, too, she fancied Mrs. Mason was coming, for I saw her point to me; and Cook took the hint and was silent. But I had heard enough to keep me from taking any fancy to Mr. Weir, even if I had been so inclined.

Roger waited in the drawing-room for a long time, and

when he came out he said we could not go to Sandcombe yet, he must have a word with Mr. Weir first. I saw he was rather put out, but I never ventured to ask him any questions about other persons' business. So he went to find Mr. Weir, and I returned to the cottage, as he told me, to wait till he was ready. It was half-past four before we set off; and I thought even then we should have had something to hinder us; for when we reached the top of the hill, by the plantation, and were going out upon the down, Roger looked back and said he heard carriage-wheels; a person he wished much to see must be arrived, but he had not expected him so soon.

"You won't stop now, Roger," I said; and I tried to draw him on. But in vain; he would stay to listen; and we heard the carriage drive up to the house; and almost directly afterwards, the footman came panting up the hill to beg Mr. Grant to go back, just for a few minutes.

It was so vexatious! I said to Roger, that we had much better leave Sandcombe till another day; they would have finished tea before we got there. And he was half inclined to agree with me, only he did not like to disappoint William. Down he ran again; and I went inside the little wicket-gate, opening upon the upper seat in the garden, and there I seated myself to wait for him.

So still and quiet it all seemed—so far away from any vexing care. I felt that if people would only let me live there undisturbed with Roger, I should have nothing else to desire. Now there were always interruptions; Roger was ordered about, and people found fault with him. I did not think it could be so always. And then I went off into a dream of what might happen by and by, of a time when he was to be master and I was to wait upon him. I never really thought I should leave Dene, I was too happy there; and yet I had a notion that Roger and I were one day to have a farm together, when he was to trust, and consult me, and let me help him in everything. For I was to be first in all ways; others were to respect and look up to Roger, but no one was to love him like me. I did not think that at all a selfish notion; I was sure I could make him so happy. My fancies were interrupted by the sound of voices at the foot of

the little rough flight of steps, which led from the garden to the upper seat. A few moments afterwards Mr. Weir made his way through the shrubs, followed by Roger and a man, whom I guessed directly to be the stranger just announced. I was not inclined to run away; my impulse almost always was to turn and face Mr. Weir, as I might a bull, to show that I did not care for him. I had a kind of notion that he was born to be every one's enemy, and that I was to rise up in defence; so I remained in my place, only standing, because I had always been taught to be respectful. But Mr. Weir took no notice of my being there, which was very provoking. I thought I would have answered him so boldly, if he had asked what business I had at the upper seat. He seemed to be full of business; he did not even stop to take breath, though he had come up the steps very fast, but he went on talking, and pointing to the down, and saying something about rent, and value of land; and then William's name was mentioned, and I saw Roger's face change. I doubt whether any one would have noticed it except myself, but I knew every turn of his likings and dislikings always. Mr. Weir gave no time for an answer for some seconds; but when he stopped at last, the strange man replied. Mr. Weir turned sharply round directly, and listened with his head bent forward, and his nose looking exactly as if it was watching for what was coming. What made people call it handsome, I can't think. His face was that of a bird of prey; not an eagle—it was not noble enough for that—but some that I have read of.

"I shouldn't like to give my opinion in a hurry, sir," were the first words I heard the stranger say; and his voice had such a pleasant sound, that I looked up at him with quite a new feeling.

He might have been three or four years younger than Roger. His face was not one which showed age; the complexion was so clear and ruddy, and the eye so bright and laughing. He was not a gentleman; at least, he had not the same kind of manner as Mr. Weir; his clothes were of a different make, and his words came out quickly and more harshly. But he was more up in the world, I should have said, than Roger; probably he had had a better education,

and seen more of things and people. I could perceive that he was not at all cowed by Mr. Weir, which made me like him directly; and the way in which he glanced at Roger gave me a notion that he knew what he was worth. I don't think, indeed, either of them could have looked at each other and doubted, for two honester faces I never saw.

"Perhaps, sir," said Roger, speaking to Mr. Weir, "Mr. Hervey and I had better walk over the hill together, and then we can talk over matters."

Mr. Weir seemed only half pleased. I was terribly afraid he would offer to come too; but he had not much of an excuse for that, whatever his wish might have been; so he just said, in an off-hand way, "Well, well, if you like it. Let me see you again, Hervey, when you come back;" and then he turned off and went down the steps.

"Now, Trot, run on before us," said Roger, opening the gate upon the down. I would rather have remained close to him, but I always obeyed him, and I kept at a distance in front, looking for foxgloves—which I could not find, it was so late in the season—and every now and then making myself a little bed amongst the fern, till Roger came up, when I ran on again. At the top of the hill, near where the paths branch off on one side to Compton, and on the other to Sandcombe, Mr. Hervey and Roger stopped. Roger pointed to Compton; "The best part of the property lies down there," he said.

"It looks compact," observed Mr. Hervey. "It is a thousand pities to cut it up; but I suppose where a lady has a fancy, there is nothing else to be done."

Roger said not a word in reply.

"She must have had a good property of her own," said Mr. Hervey.

"Dene, and the Abbey Farm, and some more land out by Hove; a good fifteen hundred a-year altogether," replied Roger.

"And all to be sold! Well, it is a fortunate thing we have only our business to do, Mr. Grant, and needn't trouble ourselves with anything beyond."

Roger hesitated; he seemed to be considering what he might say. At length it came out hastily, "Mrs. Weir

would rather it should be mortgaged than sold. That is between ourselves."

"Oh!"—— It was a very long "oh," which must have signified a good deal. Mr. Hervey's open face became grave, and he added, "So there are two minds. I guessed that."

"And I don't think he can sell it," continued Roger. "I don't think the trustees would let him do it."

"Fortunate that, perhaps," was the answer. "Well, at all events, we will go over the property to-morrow, Mr. Grant; nothing preventing."

They shook hands heartily. Mr. Hervey went back to Dene, and I caught hold of Roger's hand, and asked him what mortgaging and trustees meant.

"What I hope you will never be troubled with, Trot. Now let us have a run down the lane, or they will have done tea before we get there." He lifted me over the gate into the lane, and followed almost before I could turn to see if he was coming, and then we had a race, in spite of the rough stones, to the entrance of the farm-yard.

CHAPTER VII.

Roger was right; we were nearly late for tea. The maid was carrying the urn into the large parlour just as we arrived. I felt bound to be on my best behaviour the moment we were shown into the room, for this parlour was never used except on special occasions. It was a very good-sized room, but not in general very cheerful-looking. The walls were a pale greyish blue; a few prints in black frames were hung against them, and there was a looking-glass in a carved oak frame over the mantelpiece. On one side of the fireplace was a book-case, with glass doors, and on the other an old cracked spinet. A mahogany dining-room table, covered with a red cloth, stood in the centre of the room, and large black horse-hair chairs were ranged in a very orderly way against the wall. Besides, there was a great arm-chair, and a foot-stool worked in cross-stitch in green and red, and a screen with a green parrot upon it, which had always been a

great delight to me. I don't recollect anything else. We never used the room except for a party.

William had certainly done his best to make it look comfortable this evening. The table was spread for tea, with the best china tea-service, and a large trencher with loaves of brown and white home-made bread upon it; and there was a ham at the bottom of the table, and two pots of marmalade, and honey; and the butter was put out in a glass dish, which had been a wedding present to my mother; and in the centre there was a gay cup filled with dahlias and china-asters. A person might have been very willing to say "Yes," when asked to become the mistress of such a comfortable house as William's; that is, if comfort only was to be considered.

Mrs. Morris, and Leah, and her brother Charles, were standing up by the window when we came in. William was pointing out something in the garden. He looked round rather awkwardly as the door opened; but he welcomed Roger heartily, and kissed me, saying he had nearly given us up; and then he pushed me a few steps forward to where Leah was standing, and said, "Ursie must be grown out of your knowledge, Leah. How long is it since you have seen her?"

"Well, I don't know; two years nearly, I should think. To be sure, she is grown; she is getting quite a great girl." I could feel Leah's eye surveying me from head to foot, though just for the first moment I had a shy fit, and could not look at her: shyness, however, was not much in my way, except when I had a great respect for people; and by the time she had taken in everything belonging to me, from the ribbon on my bonnet to the thickness of my walking-boots, I was able to confront her in return. People said she was handsome, with her black curls, and high colour, and flashing eyes; if she was, I would rather have looked upon something ugly. There was not a trace of anything like softness, either in her face, or her voice, or her manner, or anything about her. She was not ill-tempered looking; but one saw she could be in a passion if she chose; and it was quite certain that if she did choose, it would always be about something that concerned herself. That day she did seem so entirely well pleased with herself! And, perhaps, she had

reason to be. There she was, conscious of a fine face and a fortune of two thousand pounds, and a good deal more to come, dressed out in a bright blue silk dress,—what is called a Waterloo blue,—and a fancy straw-bonnet, and a smart shawl, and come to visit her husband that was to be, and to be made much of, and to say what she liked or what she did not like. It was enough to turn anybody's head; not that it turned Leah's, for she was then what she always was; neither more nor less wrapped up in her own concerns; only it is so happened that circumstances made it appear as though she was.

We sat down to tea; Mrs. Morris poured it out, and Leah sat next to William, and made me come on the other side. She petted me all tea-time, offering me bread-and-butter and cake. No doubt she meant it well; but I could not help feeling that, although I was a little girl, I had just as much right in my brother's house to take what I liked as she had, and more too, perhaps, for she was not his wife yet. There was no lack of conversation. Leah was not a great talker, but her mother was; and we had all the gossip of the neighbourhood told us. Even when Roger and Charles Morris began saying something about farming, Mrs. Morris broke in in the middle with a question to Roger.

"So, Mr. Roger, you've got very comfortable quarters, I suppose, up at Dene?"

"Very," was Roger's short reply.

"And all the family there now, I hear; or at least, all coming soon. The bride, Mrs. Temple, and her husband are expected next week, they say."

"I have not heard."

"Isn't that capital now?" and Mrs. Morris turned her broad good-humoured face to William. "Your brother is as close as a locked pantry;—as if he didn't know everything about the Weirs, if he chose to say it!"

Leah took up her mother shortly. "You won't make him tell by asking questions, mother. You'll only provoke him to shut up more."

"There is nothing to shut up about, that I am aware of," said Roger. "If I knew Mrs. Temple was coming, I would say so; but I don't."

"Ah, well! then they're wise in keeping their business to themselves," said Mrs. Morris, nodding her head meaningly. "But folks outside Dene are not quite so careful, Mr. Roger; and they say,—I wouldn't for the world tell it for truth,—that Mr. Temple is not satisfied about his wife's fortune, and is coming to see her uncle about it; and I have heard that Mr. Weir will have to sell part of the Dene estate: not that I can understand myself what business he has with it, for it is all Mrs. Weir's, settled upon her strictly, —so Mr. Dillon the lawyer told Charles, when he saw him in Hove last week."

"She won't be a wise woman if she gives it up for any of her husband's claims," said Leah.

"That is what you think, is it?" said William, laughing. "I suppose that is to teach me what I may expect; but I am not to be daunted. Do you think there is any cause, Mrs. Morris? Will Leah stand aloof and say she won't help at a pinch?"

"Leah is a good, sensible girl, and you are not like Mr. Weir," replied Mrs. Morris. "If you were, you might beg pretty long before her father and I would give her to you. Why, it's all the talk in Staffordshire, what a cat-and-dog life they lead. Down here there is not so much known about them."

"I suppose when I turn dog, I may expect you to turn cat, Leah?" said William.

"Something like it," replied Leah, a little quickly. I don't think she fancied William's always bringing it forward in this way, that she was going to be married, and that he was to be her master.

"It's no wonder when they married as they did," continued Mrs. Morris. "She, just out of the school-room, and a second wife. I heard all about it the other day, from the Kemps of Longside. They are cousins of the Herveys in Staffordshire; and John Hervey is a land surveyor, and has had a good deal of business with Mr. Weir, or at least his father had for years. Poor man, he died of low fever about this time twelve months ago; since then there have been changes in the business, and I hear John is likely to settle in this neighbourhood, close to the Kemps."

"Is that the Mr. Hervey that came over the hill with us, Roger?" I asked; for I had been taking in eagerly all that was said.

"I suppose so," was his short answer; and he pushed his tea-cup to Mrs. Morris, and asked for another cup of tea.

"Oh! John Hervey is here, is he?" exclaimed Mrs. Morris. "That makes it all clear;—you know, Charles, we heard he was coming. Of course, then, it is quite true about the sale of the property." She addressed herself to Roger, but received no answer.

William had no dislike to gossip, so he brought her back to the point she had started from. "Well, but, Mrs. Morris, you have not told me the interesting part about the marriage. You know it's fitting Leah and I should hear, that we may take warning in time." He looked kindly at Leah, but she only smiled haughtily in return, and when he tried to give her hand a little friendly pat, she managed to draw it away, so that his fingers came down upon the table instead.

"The long and the short of it is," continued Mrs. Morris, "that Mr. Weir spends money faster than he can get it, and has done so from a boy. He had as fine a property as a man might wish to have, some six thousand a year when he came of age; but he ran through nearly all of it, and then married a Miss Le Fevre, a Staffordshire heiress. I suspect there was some disappointment in that quarter about money matters. She had less than he expected, people said; and the very year after her death, he married Miss Mayne, that is the present Mrs. Weir, who has a fortune likewise."

"He has been a lucky man," said William. "Two rich wives!—it's more than he deserves."

"A good deal more," continued Mrs. Morris. "As to his first wife, he might have done very well with her; I never heard anything about her, but this poor thing has a hard life of it."

"She is very strange, mother, if Jane Shaw says true," said Charles Morris.

"Strange or not, he is enough to make her strange," replied Mrs. Morris; "always thwarting and taunting her, and she so ill always!"

"That is what provokes him, I have heard," remarked

Leah. "He can't bear anybody to be ill, because of the trouble it gives." She cast her eyes complacently over her own substantial figure, and I suppose it crossed her mind that she was not likely to make William angry from a like cause.

"Mr. Roger could tell us more about that than any one else, I suspect," said Mrs. Morris, "only he is so prudent."

"I have seen Mrs. Weir," I exclaimed, proud of my superior knowledge; "and she sits in a great arm-chair, and looks as if she was very ill indeed."

"Oh! you are allowed to see her, are you?" was the general exclamation, and all eyes were directed towards me. "Is she so very small as they say?"

"I don't think she is above a head taller than I am," I replied; "but she was curled up in the chair so, I can't quite tell."

A general laugh followed, even Roger joined in it; but he added, as if to give me warning, "It's no use for you to try and tell anything about Mrs. Weir, Trot. What should such a child as you know?"

"But I can tell about her," I continued; "I have looked at her a great deal; and I know what Mr. Weir said,—that he shouldn't encourage anybody to marry."

"Because of what I had been asking, I suppose," said William. "I had been talking to him, and telling him I was likely to have hard times coming, and so I hoped he would be merciful about the land I rent of him."

"And what did Mrs. Weir say to him, Ursie?" inquired Mrs. Morris.

"She did not say anything," I replied; "only she told Mrs. Mason to take me away."

"He interferes with her always, I have heard," continued Mrs. Morris. "She never takes a fancy to anything, but what he steps in and spoils her pleasure. It seems, indeed, as if he had a spite against women, for he is never pleasant to them."

"A second wife ought to have known better than to be taken in by him," observed Leah.

"She should have asked him to drink tea," said William; "that would have been the right thing."

"Mrs. Weir has not too much wisdom of any kind, as far as I can learn," replied Mrs. Morris. "I have been told she is next door to an idiot."

I started from my seat. "Mrs. Weir an idiot! She was no more an idiot than I was! She had been very kind to me; she had given me some cake and some ginger-wine. I couldn't bear such things said of her."

"Silence, Ursie! 'Little girls should be seen and not heard;'" and Roger laid his hand heavily on my shoulder. "I don't think any one who knows Mrs. Weir can call her an idiot," he continued; "she is as clever a woman of business as any one might wish to talk to."

"Oh! you are in her confidence, I perceive," observed Mrs. Morris; "no wonder we are so careful. But you mustn't be angry, Mr. Roger. I only say what the world does; and it is certain she is kept like a doll, waited upon from morning till night, as if she was not able to take care of herself, and pleased with pretty things set about her, as a child might be. I know that from our cook, who was kitchen-maid at Dene last year. She said Mrs. Weir was a mere nobody, and that Miss Milicent gave all the orders."

"Miss Milicent is likely to do that, whether she has to deal with idiots or sensible women, I suspect," observed Charles Morris; "she would rule a regiment. But how could such a woman have a mother like Mrs. Weir?"

"How could Mrs. Weir have a daughter like Miss Milicent? you mean," said Leah. "But there is no rule that I ever knew, why mothers and daughters should be alike." She made a little movement as she spoke, which showed that she had finished her own tea, and expected every one else to finish theirs. William drank up what was left in his cup, and never asked for more; and Leah, without saying anything to her mother, rose from the table.

Mrs. Morris laughed good-naturedly, and said they were leaving her in the lurch, and they ought to remember that she had been making tea for them all; but Leah was not to be put out of her way, and she went off with William, saying that she wanted to go over the house.

Mrs. Morris motioned to me to come and sit near her, to keep her company, but Roger made an excuse for me. He

had promised William, he said, to look at some fences which had been put up round the yard. He should like me to go with him, and then I could see the pigs and the new calf. There would not be time else, as it was growing late.

Mrs. Morris was only half pleased with the arrangement, I could see; neither was I, for I felt, from Roger's manner, that he was dissatisfied with me. The moment we were out of the house, he said, "You are a chatterbox, Ursie. That won't do if you are to live with me. What is said and done at Dene is never to be talked of outside the gates. It is a rule you will have to remember all your life, that when you live with a family, you are no more to talk about their concerns, than you would about your own. It isn't honest."

"Mrs. Morris talked; I didn't," I exclaimed; "and I said nothing but what was true."

"That is no matter," continued Roger; "once for all I say that, if you are to live with me, you are not to repeat anything you hear. There is often more mischief in repeating than in doing: and I hate a gossip."

Roger only intended to give me a caution to be used generally; but he could not prevent my feeling there was something of a mystery about Dene.

I went with him to the yard to look at the fences, and then fed the pigs, and paid a visit to the calf; but all the time I was not happy. When we were going into the house again, I stopped him, and said, "Roger, you are not angry with me? I am so sorry."

He caught me up in his great arms, and gave me such a hug!—it was like being in a bear's grasp. One had only to say one was sorry; and forgiveness was ready directly.

Leah had her things on ready to go when we went back to the parlour. Charles Morris had been sent to order the pony-chaise; for they had driven over, though it was nothing of a walk for a strong woman like Leah. She, and William, and Mrs. Morris, were deep in consultation; and directly I came in, Leah took hold of me as though she had a kind of right to me, and said, "It won't be so long now, Ursie, before you and I may see more of each other."

"Only three weeks," said William; "what do you say, Ursie, to have a new sister in three weeks' time?"

"I have done very well without one," was my answer. It made me angry that they should all take it so for granted that I was to be pleased.

William laughed awkwardly; but Leah answered, "You will learn to do better with one soon;" and then she walked away to the glass to arrange her black curls.

I had managed to put all the party out by my pert speech, and no wonder; Roger especially was vexed, and made me beg Leah's pardon, which I did, I fear, with a bad grace. William said, when Mrs. Morris and the others were gone, that I was getting beyond Roger, and he was sure I was not kept strictly enough. It was a good thing for me, he added, that Leah was coming into the family, for there would be some one then to keep me in order. He could not help thinking, indeed, that it might be well if the plan that had been first talked about could be carried out, and if I were to come and live at Sandcombe entirely. Of course that would require some arrangement about expense; but no doubt Roger would be willing to take his share, as he had no claims of his own.

I suppose William forgot that Roger took all the expense at that time; and that the claims, as he called them, were only such as he had made to please himself. Strange to say, I was not frightened at the proposal, I was so certain that Roger would never consent to it. I only held his hand more tightly, and squeezed it very hard when he said, he was afraid that Trot did require a strict hand over her; but she had been much better since she went to school; and as to parting with her, he would as soon think of parting with his right eye; many thanks to William, though, for proposing it.

No: I might have many trials in store for me in life, but a home with Leah Morris I felt certain was not to be one.

CHAPTER VIII.

Three weeks after that, William and Leah Morris were husband and wife. They were married at Hatton Church, and a grand day was made on the occasion. A party of

five-and-twenty went to church—most of them Leah's relations—for we had scarcely any living near enough to be asked; and there were six bridesmaids dressed in blue gauze and white bonnets; and Leah herself in a figured lilac silk, with flounces which stood out like a hoop, and a pink bonnet. I was one of the bridesmaids, the youngest, and so made much of; and I almost forgave Leah for becoming my sister-in-law, when I found myself in such a grand position. The day was fine, and everything went off well. Leah was a capital manager—much better than Miss Milicent, for she never talked about what she did. Mrs. Morris took care of the eating, and Mr. Morris provided some wonderfully strong ale, and saw that there was plenty of wine for those who liked it, and spirits for any who had a fancy for something more powerful. But Leah was the person who kept everything going; at least, as long as she was there. She was not at all shy, and, what was more to her praise, she did not pretend to be; so she talked to one and the other, and told them where they were to sit, and what they were to do; and even helped to marshal them round the breakfast-table after they came back from church. She could put her hand to anything; and William looked on as pleased as possible, feeling, I am sure, that he had made a capital bargain in marrying such a good manager.

Roger was very merry, too; and as for me, I laughed and talked with every one; especially I made acquaintance with some of the Shaws, of White Hill. Jane Shaw was but two years older than myself, and being the only two children who were bridesmaids, we were put together at breakfast; and Jane told me all about her home, and how they kept a phaeton, and had a beautiful best parlour, with pictures in it, and wax flowers under a glass-case; and then she made me look at her pocket-handkerchief, and admire the pretty lace round it; and showed me a bracelet of large white beads, (Roman pearls she called them,) and a gold brooch, which her mother had given her to wear. She talked in a very silly way, and was so set up that she made me boast in my turn, and I forgot what Roger had said about not gossiping, and described how beautiful Dene was, and how I was in the habit of going to see Mrs. Weir, and reading

to her. Jane Shaw was very curious like every one else, about Mrs. Weir. The only people who could tell her anything about her, she said, were the Kemps, of Longside; and they didn't know the Kemps now. She had not spoken herself to Mary Kemp, though they stood close together in church.

"Is Mary Kemp here?" I asked.

"Oh, yes; just across the table, down at the lower end; don't you see? She was talking to little Jessie Lee just before breakfast. You must know her."

"I have played with her sometimes," I replied, "but not often; and I don't know Jessie Lee."

"Not know her! Well, that is to live shut up! Why, Jessie is a cousin of your own."

"A cousin of mine!" I stared at her in astonishment.

"Yes, to be sure; she is Leah Morris's—what a shame of me to forget!—she is Mrs. Grant's cousin's child; and she is going to live with the Morrises. She is not much more than a baby, for she is only five years old; but she has been away lately, because Mrs. Morris has been to busy to attend to her."

"I saw Roger playing with a child," I said; "but I didn't know who it was; he always takes to babies."

"The Morrises make fuss enough about her," continued Jane. "You should see how she comes to church, with her little round hat and white feather. They will make her quite conceited; and there is no need, for she is that already. She is a regular beauty."

Our conversation was interrupted just then, for Leah stood up to cut the cake, and there was a great drinking of healths and cheering; and afterwards, Leah left the table, and Mrs. Morris went with her to pack up the last things in her travelling-box, and a few minutes afterwards she came back to say goodbye. She and William were to go, that afternoon, to Hartwell, a town about eight miles beyond Hove; and the next day they were to proceed to London, where they were to spend a fortnight with an aunt of ours and some of Leah's relations.

Things were a little dull after she was gone, though Charles Morris did get up and make a speech, in which he

said that he hoped all the bridesmaids would be married before that time next year. Jane Shaw and I laughed, because it seemed such a droll notion for us children, but I don't think any one else did. I suppose they had all heard it too often, for I believe the same thing is always said at weddings.

Roger was Mrs. Morris's right hand when Leah was gone. It was quite a new thing to see him come out in that way. He and Charles Morris did all they could to make people merry, and as soon as the breakfast was cleared away (it was called a breakfast, but in truth it was a dinner), a fiddler, who had been sent for, was brought in, and we all stood up to dance. I was made to begin, because I was William's sister, and very pleasant I thought it to be at the head of the country dance, though I knew little enough of what I was to do, and could never remember whether I was to give my right hand or my left across. Roger would not dance at first: he said it was not in his way, and there were plenty without him; but just at the last, when every one was laughing at him, he caught up little Jessie Lee, and declared she should be his partner.

Jessie was frightened at first, but Roger had such a way with children, they never could hold out against him; and when he had smoothed her little soft cheek with his great hand, and carried her in his arms to the top of the room, she was quite won; and he managed to twist her round wherever she ought to go, and ran with her down the dance and up again till we were all in fits of laughter, and Jessie most of all. I don't remember much about my partners: I began with Charles Morris, and one of Jane Shaw's brothers; and after that I think I danced with Mr. Hervey, for he was staying at Longside, and was going to settle in the neighbourhood; so he had been asked to the wedding, principally to please Roger, who had made great friends with him. Altogether it was a very pleasant day, and when Leah was gone I enjoyed it heartily; but while she was present I fancied she was watching, and would find fault with me. We had a great supper at eight o'clock, and by ten every one was gone. Roger, Mr. Hervey, and I, drove home over the down, in the Sandcombe titled-cart, which Roger had borrowed for

the purpose. Mr. Hervey was going to sleep in our little room inside the kitchen, for he had business at Dene the next day. A beautiful drive we had, and when we reached the top of the long lane, leading out of Hatton, and were on the ridge, just under St. Anne's, the moon shone out quite bright, and we could see the white cliffs over the sea nearly as clearly as if it had been daylight. I wanted Roger to let me climb to the top of St. Anne's, and look at the moonlight upon the water, but he said it was a great deal too late, so we only drove across the down slowly, Roger being afraid of the ruts, and were soon within the plantation gate. I believe I had talked a great deal more than I ought all the way, for Roger looked a little grave when I wished him good night, and said, "You have a whirligig head, Trot, it's well there is not a wedding every day to turn it." Mr. Hervey seemed to think him rather hard upon me. "It is a very merry little head anyhow," he said. "I don't know who has a right to complain of it, Ursie. Brother Roger would be very dull without it."

That was kind of Mr. Hervey, but not so kind and true as Roger's remark. My head was like a whirligig, and it was a good thing that I was not likely to be put much in the way of such excitement as I had that day.

CHAPTER IX.

I MUST give but a slight sketch of the events which followed the wedding, and indeed of the next few years. William and Leah came back to Sandcombe, and Leah settled herself down as mistress of the farm, and carried everything with a high hand, which, yet, could not be complained of, as she certainly was a good manager, looking so carefully into everything, that no one dared to cheat her. She used to boast that she had never lost even an ounce of dripping from the time she first became housekeeper. It was not a good kind of training for William. He was too much inclined to be close by nature, and now that his wife encouraged him in it he was even less open-handed than before. He was

hard upon his labourers, and grumbled a good deal if there was any talk of raising their wages. One severe winter, however, there was an outcry all round the country, and then Leah persuaded him into being more liberal; for hard though she was, she had a great notion of doing what the gentry did. This was after a public meeting about the state of the agricultural population, as it was called, when Mr. Stewart of Hatton, got up and made a long speech, and said it was a crying sin that the labourers should be kept down as they were. William rented some land of Mr. Stewart, and was afraid to offend him, so the labourers had a shilling a week more after that; and Leah made a great boast of it, and declared they were ruining themselves to keep the people from starving. I heard her say it myself one day, when she had come over to Dene, on her way to Longside. As I saw her seat herself in the little pony-chaise, and wrap herself up in her great fur tippet, I could not help thinking that if the poor were to wait till she denied herself even one luxury for them, they were likely to die of want.

Yet Leah and I were apparently very good friends. She was quick enough in understanding, and I think she soon saw that I was not to be put upon, though I was a child, and that Roger would not allow it. The only way in which she showed she did not like me was, by the difference of her manner to me and Jessie Lee. Jessie was very often staying with her,—it brightened her up,—for Sandcombe was a lonely place, and there seemed to be no prospect of any children to make it merry. I don't think either Leah or William cared much about this, for children would have been an expense and a trouble, and they were not naturally fond of them: but still, in the winter time, Leah liked to have some one about when William was busy, and so she often persuaded her mother to send Jessie over to her. It used to provoke me, I must confess, when I heard her say, drawing up her head and shaking her curls, "I have just sent for poor little Jessie; it will be a help to mother to be rid of her for a while, and we mustn't grudge the expense." I knew well enough that, when Jessie was away, Mrs. Morris was sad for want of her, and I knew too that Leah made full use of her when she was at Sandcombe, and took good care that,

if she was an expense in one way, she should be a saving in another. The girl who helped in the kitchen was always sent way when Jessie came; and though Leah liked her cousin to dress herself in her best, and sit in the parlour in the afternoon, in case Mr. Stewart, or the Shaws, or the clergyman from Hatton should call, yet she made her work like a scrub in the morning. Jessie had a meek temper, and never complained, and upon the whole I don't know that she had much cause. She was an orphan, and left without a penny, and the Morrises had quite adopted her; and if Mrs. Morris was at all in fault in the way she brought her up, it was that she spoiled her. She was fond of Jessie for her good nature, and proud of her for her beauty. Many pretty children don't grow up pretty, but this was not the case with Jessie. It was quite impossible not to notice her; she had such a bright complexion, a good nose and mouth, and such very soft blue eyes, with a kind of beseeching look in them which touched one's heart directly she looked at one. No one would have thought that she had come of common parents, and indeed her mother was quite a lady; but she married badly, and fell into poverty, and then her own relations cast her off, and she was obliged to depend entirely upon the Morrises. Jessie bore the mark of her origin in everything she did and said. It used almost to startle me sometimes, if I happened to go over to Sandcombe early, and found her busy at house work, to hear her speak and ask me how I was, and inquire for Roger. The voice was so sweet, I could have thought it was Mrs. Weir talking to me, only that there was no melancholy in it. I don't think Jessie knew what melancholy meant. Her high spirits, indeed, sometimes carried her away too far, but she was never boisterous. I was always fond of her, though I could not make her much of a friend, for we did not care for the same things. She had very little education; reading she did not much care for, and I don't think she would ever have written and spelled correctly, but that Charles Morris one day found out her ignorance, and took her under his own teaching. They seemed to think she would learn everything naturally, and she managed to make a fair show, though really she could do little well beyond

housework and trimming a bonnet. The life she led was too busy for her to feel the need of anything more, and she had so much petting and loving from every one, that she was ignorant of any want in herself. I don't know quite what it was which made her so loveable. No one could have called her sensible, and she was very much given to dress and gaiety when she could meet with them; but even when she provoked me with her silliness one minute, I could not help being fond of her the next. She had such a way of saying she was sorry, and she wished she was as good as I was. I suspect that won upon me, for I dearly liked to be looked up to. Besides, I must say that she was very grateful; the least little kindness touched her; and though Leah had been ever so hard upon her, I believe she would have worked her fingers off for her, because she was a Morris. She always said the Morrises were the best friends she had in the world.

What did Jessie more harm than anything else was the acquaintance with the Shaws; but I may leave that for the present. It will be better to put down a few things about myself and Dene first. The property was not sold, as people said it was going to be; but it was mortgaged, for how much nobody knew—or at least if Roger knew he never told. If it had been sold I suppose we should have been obliged to move, but as it was, we remained on year after year. Towards the end of every summer, Mr. Weir and his wife, and Miss Milicent, came regularly, and stayed till nearly winter: and I learnt, by degrees, to look forward to this as the pleasant time, in spite of Mr. Weir's pride and Miss Milicent's fussiness. My delight was to be with Mrs. Weir, and this was not strange, for she was exceedingly kind, and did more for me in the way of education than I could possibly have expected. I had gone on learning what I could at Compton school, and upon the whole I think I was very well taught, and not at all backward for my age; but by the time I was fourteen, there was not much else which the mistress could teach me; and then Leah tried to persuade Roger to send me for a year to Hove, and to pay for it out of the money that had been put by for me. I don't think William would have allowed this, for though, as I have said, he was close by nature, he was not at all wanting in affection, and the money had been intended as a

nest egg for me, and so he would have wished it to remain increasing till I grew up. But his opinion was not needed as Roger stopped the notion at once; and now that I lived with him, his will was law.

When at last I was really too old to go to Compton school any longer, Roger thought it might do to send away Sarah and give me the house work to look after. Leah objected to this: she said I was not born to it; that I had always been accustomed to a servant, and she thought I should have one still: but Mrs. Mason took Roger's side, and said it was a very good plan; and Fanny should help me at the cottage, and I might help Fanny at the house, and she would look after us both.

That was one of the greatest helps Roger had in his care of me. I think he would rather have sent me to school than have left me at home with no one to think about me; but Mrs. Mason kept me very strict, never letting me make acquaintances without her knowing it; and taking care that I should have no idle time upon my hands for gossiping and folly. There was very little variety in my life. Once Mrs. Mason took me to London to stay with her for a week at a friend's house, and I saw all the chief sights, and had a glimpse of a world which did not please me half as much as Dene, though for the time I heartily enjoyed it; but this was all the change I had for several years. I might have found it a dull life, and required more for my happiness but for Mrs. Weir. Mrs. Kemp, of Longside, was very kind to me, and Mary Kemp and I became great friends; but neither of them could quite give me what I wanted and found in Mrs. Weir. Books were still, as they had always been, my great pleasure, and as long as I could go to the upper-seat,—close to the down, and hidden by the shrubbery and the plantation trees, and read, I had no wish for anything else in the world. Mrs. Weir soon found this out; but she only noticed and helped me in my taste by degrees. It seemed as if she was afraid of showing that she took much interest in anything; and for some time I was always sent away, if I was in the drawing-room when Mr. Weir came in. But by degrees I gained a better footing.

Mr. Weir delighted in hearing anything he possessed admired; he cared little what it was that was liked, or who it

was that liked it, all he wanted was to hear people say "Oh! how beautiful!" And so it happened that Dene being dull at times when no one was staying in the house, he used to amuse himself, when I was quite young, with seeing my wonder and pleasure at the garden and the fountains, and the peacock and peahen, and the pea chicks, and the goldfish. It was a very honest pleasure on my part; I was never tired of holding out bread to the peacock, and seeing him stretch out his beautiful long neck and snatch it out of my fingers; and I don't think the pleasure of finding the feathers ever grew less; and being naturally rather free spoken, I used to say out what came into my head, and this made Mr. Weir laugh. I believe we are all grateful to persons who make us laugh, whether they are men, women or children; and I can imagine that Mr. Weir was so particularly, for his was not a laughing nature, if his countenance spoke truth. There was a sneer upon it almost always, and sneers and hearty laughter don't go well together. When Mrs. Weir found out that her husband was not likely to interfere, she made me be more with her. Before I left school I was in the habit of spending a great part of Saturday, after I had mended my clothes, in reading to her, and at such times she chose books which were likely to improve me, history, and lives of celebrated people, and such things; but what she liked most was to read her favorite bits of poetry to me, and to make me learn them.

I did not understand a great deal,—but even when the sense was beyond me, there was a pleasure in listening to the sound of Mrs. Weir's voice. It came over me like the distant rush of the waves upon the shingles, as I have heard it often, when standing by the oratory on St. Anne's; or as the sighing of the wind among the firs in the plantation, on a beautiful summer's day, when a thin grey mist floated over the level country, and every now and then the breeze rolled it away, and showed the lines of sparkling blue sea, far away beyond Hove. Tears have often come into my eyes, as I have hearkened to those sounds, which seem so especially to belong to God; and they have risen again and again unbidden, at the first words which Mrs. Weir would read,—startling me with a sense of something that was not of this world,—an echo, it might be, of a voice that had been heard in Paradise. Children feel these things, grown up people

reason upon them; but I think children know more about them. As time went on, and I learnt to know more of Mrs. Weir's life,—her whole history seemed to me to be told in the strange, sweet, sad tones of her voice, as she read the verses in which she delighted. It was happy for me that I was not with her always. What I did see of her was good for me, I am sure in many ways, but to have lived always with such a person would have quite unfitted me for my real work. Roger was a little afraid of this, and I don't think he was sorry that I had Miss Milicent near, to prevent my becoming too much wrapt up in Mrs. Weir and my books.

There was no fear of poetry where Miss Milicent has any authority. I don't think she had ever learned a verse in her life except "How doth the little busy bee;" at least that was the only thing I ever heard her repeat. How she came to be so entirely unlike her mother, I never could understand in those days, but since I have seen more of the world, I have thought that mothers who have any one particular fancy, or taste, or even good principle, are apt to bring it forward on all occasions, and so their children take a disgust at it, and run the contrary way.

I know I have observed in religion, how persons who are very good and earnest themselves give their children a turn against it, by continually talking about it. Mrs. Weir did this I suspect with her poetry. She did not see what a different nature Miss Milicent's was; indeed, I don't think she was quick at understanding any person's nature. She was always living in a kind of dream. One thing I must say for her,—Miss Milicent would have been a puzzle to any one. She was not like father, nor mother, nor cousin, nor any one belonging to her, that I ever saw, nor, indeed, like any one living but herself. Mrs. Mason said one day that she took after her grandmother, and that might have been the case. When I first saw her, she must have been about five and twenty; but she was then as old in her ways as she was a dozen years after. I took it upon faith, when I first knew her, that she was a good woman, and that is saying a good deal; for no faith that was ever heard of would have made me believe that Leah Morris was good.

It always seemed to me that Miss Milicent fancied she

was sent into the world on purpose to set it to rights; and I believe honestly that she began with herself, as far as her knowledge went. She was neither passionate, nor sulky; she always spoke the truth, and was thoughtful for the poor, and took a great deal of pains with their children; and as for industry, she worked harder than Roger. I often puzzled myself in those days to find out what the fault in her was, and at last I settled that she was selfish. She wished everybody to do right, and be comfortable, but it must be in her way. She would deny herself like a saint to carry out anything which she thought likely to be good; but she could not sit still, nor keep the room tidy, nor speak low and soft, because of her mother's wishes—whimsies, she used to call them—that was her favourite word; and I suppose Mrs. Weir had a few such; and certainly it was irritating for a person of Miss Milicent's age to be complained of as if she had been a child of five; but then she ought never to have given cause for the complaint. God had granted her quick sense, and she should have seen her mother's little odd ways, and made allowance for them, and valued Mrs. Weir for the many things there were to be valued in her, not set herself to alter them as she did. That was the cause of half the family troubles, because it destroyed anything like sympathy between the mother and the daughter; and so each went her separate way and grew more and more strange, and wedded to her own fashion. Miss Milicent always took care that I did my work properly; and she taught me many useful things; amongst others, to knit stockings and cut out dresses. She was clever at that, though she chose to dress so oddly; and Roger was glad I should learn, for there was still an idea that it might be a good thing for me some day to be a dress-maker. After a time Mrs. Weir employed me in doing little things for her in the way of altering dresses and in plain needlework; and Mrs. Richardson, of Compton, sent me common dresses to make up, and spoke for me to Mrs. Stewart of Hatton, and several other persons; and at last I found I had more than enough to do; though I never professed to take to the occupation as a business. The comfort to me was that I was able in consequence to help Roger in paying my own expenses, and as I saved him a ser-

vant, and even gained something by assisting Fanny at the house when Mr. Weir was at Dene, there was no notion of sending me away to earn my own living, which was what I dreaded more than anything.

Of course when I became so busy with my work I had but little time for reading, though I never gave it up entirely.

CHAPTER X.

Things went on in this quiet way for a long time. But some alterations were made in the place: a billiard room was built over the store house, and a sitting-room and two small bedrooms were added to the house; and some shrubs planted to enlarge the grounds. The billiard room helped greatly to amuse Mr. Weir when he and his friends came down. He took much more kindly to Dene after it was built, but I don't think it improved him. He grew more irritable and restless, and the people whom he brought with him were not such as were likely to improve him. Eating, and drinking, and billiards, were the occupations at home, and when they went out shooting they mixed with persons who were not equal to them by birth, and whose characters did not stand well in the county. Young Mr. Shaw, of White Hill, was invited to Dene every now and then, and the family held up their heads in consequence, and thought themselves very grand; and the girls dressed more smartly than ever, and talked of Mr. Weir as though he was quite one of themselves. But I knew better than that. Mr. Weir would not have spoken to any one of them but for some object of his own, for a prouder man never lived.

All these things, however, affected me but little. I used to hear of what went on from Jessie Lee, who was quite one with the Shaws, but I followed my own ways, and lived at Dene without much to trouble me, till I was two and twenty. Roger was then thirty-six; quite an old man, and an old bachelor too. People used to laugh, and say that I should be a rich heiress, for Roger was surely making money all this time, and as he was certain never to marry, it would all be left to me.

They thought he had an easy place and a quiet life. Little they knew of all the things he had to vex and fret him. Mr. Weir was a most tiresome man to deal with: he had as many minds as there are days in the year; one week he would have things done and the next week he would not; and what was worse, he changed not only about things but people. How he kept on so long with Roger was surprising, only I believe that he felt Roger was careful, and by looking after his affairs made money go farther than any one else was likely to do. But as for other people, such as the gardener, and the under-gardener, and the labourers, and even the gamekeeper, it was a perpetual one going and another coming; and Roger had to give fresh orders and directions to each new person, because it was Mr. Weir's will that everything should be done through him. I have often heard William counsel him to give it up and try something else, but Roger only laughed, and said, "Where is there a place without trouble in this world? I know the worst here, and I don't know it elsewhere." "A rolling stone gathers no moss," was one of his favourite proverbs, and it often helped him to decide when he was in difficulty; but there is no question that it was a very trying life.

The summer that I was two and twenty, Mrs. Weir arrived about the middle of August, looking extremely ill, and Miss Milicent not in her usual spirits; but there was no Mr. Weir. We settled down into our usual ways: Miss Milicent busying herself with the house and the garden, and going over to Compton to talk to Mrs. Richardson about the school; and Mrs. Weir living to herself, curled up in her easy chair, working for the poor, never going out, and requiring me to go and read to her every evening at five o'clock; but Mr. Weir's name was scarcely mentioned by any one, and even Roger seemed to take it as a matter of course that he was not coming, though he never told me why.

I had made tea one evening, and Roger and I were sitting down comfortably together, when we heard a knock at the door, and I went to open it. Mr. Hervey was there, I shook hands with him, and welcomed him gladly, for he was now quite an old friend. He was often at Dene on business,

and we met frequently at Longside, the Kemps being his relations, and indeed it had been said that he was going to marry Mary Kemp. He often came in in this way unawares, so we were not surprised to see him, and we asked him, as a matter of course, to sit down and take a cup of tea with us. I noticed then for the first time that he was flurried. He answered rather quickly that he had not time, he had just a few words to say to Roger, that was all. I got up to go away, but Mr. Hervey prevented me, and he and Roger went together into the parlour. It was dull to drink my tea alone, so I put the teapot upon the hob, to keep it as warm as I could, and went to my work. I was making a set of shirts for Roger, and I was obliged to snatch all the spare moments I could. I happened to be sitting with my back to the light, but presently a shadow darkened the window, and before I could turn round to see who it was, I heard Jessie Lee's gentle little voice, saying, "Good evening to you, Ursie. Why are you all alone?"

I went to the window to speak to her, and ask her what she had come for, but I drew back vexed, for Jane Shaw was with her, and though William and Leah found no fault with the acquaintance, I never could bear it.

"So you don't know me," said Jane, laughing a little angrily. "We don't see too much of each other, certainly, but I should not have thought we were quite such strangers!"

I opened the window to answer for the sake of civility. I knew I had no right to show my dislike rudely; and yet I think any one who had looked at Jane Shaw, would have understood what it was that I could not bear in her.

A bold, cunning looking girl she was, yet not ugly. She had beautiful hair, which she wore in large long curls; and though her skin was freckled, it was very clear. She had a low forehead, which I disliked, quick grey eyes, and a small mouth, with very thin lips; but she set up for being pretty, and because of that spent all her money upon dress; and I had heard her say that she was quite determined to marry a gentleman.

Jessie looked like a little angel by her side,—so young, and sweet, and simple,—only rather too smartly dressed to please me.

"Where do you come from?" I asked, for want of something better to say.

"We have been to Hove," answered Jessie. "I wanted to do some shopping, and Aunt Morris (she always called Mrs. Morris aunt) gave me a holiday. We went in the chaise; and coming back, Jane and I had a wish to walk over the down to Hatton, instead of going round by the road; so the boy drove the chaise, and we came on by ourselves. Jane is going to sleep at our house to-night."

This was a very straightforward history, yet it did not please me. All I could say was, "I don't think I should have chosen such a long walk after a day's shopping!"

"Mrs. Weir is here, isn't she?" asked Jane, carelessly and leaning against the window, determined, I could see, not to move.

"Yes, she and Miss Milicent came about six weeks ago," I replied.

"Oh! and not Mr. Weir. That must be good riddance for you. But I heard in Hove that he came last night."

"Hove people know more about our concerns than we do ourselves, then," I said.

Jane laughed, and answered in a sharp, conceited way, "Mr. Weir might not think fit to tell you all he means to do: but take my word for it, he will be down soon."

"May be," I replied. "He will find everything ready for him if he does come;" and as I spoke I made a little movement as though to shut the window, to give Jane a notion that she might go. Then a feeling of self-reproach came over me because I had been uncivil, and I forced myself to say, "Perhaps you would like to come in and take a cup of tea. Roger and I were just sitting down, only Mr. Hervey called and interrupted us."

"Well, Jessie, what do you say?" exclaimed Jane, in her off-hand way; "it would be a good plan, I think."

She had not the graciousness to say "Thank you," but Jessie was very prettily grateful, and afraid they were giving trouble.

I put the teapot upon the table again, and cut some bread; and, knowing that Jessie was fond of sweet things, I went to the cupboard and took out a pot of marmalade, some

which Mrs. Mason had taught me to make, and which had been much praised.

Jane had a sneer ready for everything. "You live here in comfort enough, Ursie," she said. "But what will you do when Roger takes to himself a wife?"

"I shall see when the time comes," was my short reply.

Jessie was quick in knowing when subjects were unpleasant, so she said, merrily, "Ursie is Mr. Roger's wife; he doesn't want any other."

"Trust him for that," replied Jane; "Roger Grant is not made of different stuff from other men; is he?"

"Perhaps I think he is," was my answer, half in joke and half in earnest; for I could not have a tiff about Roger with a girl like Jane Shaw; "but," I added, "one thing I know, that when Roger does take a wife, it will be a sensible one."

"Mary Kemp, I suppose," said Jane, laughing.

"No," observed Jessie; "Mary is going to be married to Mr. Hervey."

"Is that true?" I asked eagerly. "I have heard it said, but never knew whether to believe it, as neither Mrs. Kemp nor Mary owned it."

"Miss Brown, the dress-maker, declared it was true to-day," replied Jessie. "I went there to have my new dress fitted, and she told us that she believed Mary Kemp's wedding clothes were ordered."

"Mary Kemp is a very good girl," I replied, "and she will make a good wife. I hope they are going to live near."

"More than I do," observed Jane; "one set of Kemps is enough in a neighbourhood. What nonsense do you think old Kemp is about now? Father says he will be the ruin of the farmers, if he goes on as he does."

"Giving his labourers a shilling a week more?" I asked, rather sharply; "that was his last offence, I know."

"Spoiling the labourers," exclaimed Jane. "Joining with Mr. Vincent, the agent, and making Mr. Stewart throw away all his money upon their cottages. Father wanted a new scullery and coal-house put on for us, and he spoke to Mr. Vincent about it, and the answer was, that he didn't think it could be done this year, because Mr. Stewart had a

plan for rebuilding most of his cottages, and giving them all two bed-rooms. Such nonsense, when the labourers have gone on with one for the last fifty years, and never complained! And who is at the bottom of this, but Farmer Kemp, with Mr. Richardson, of Compton, to back him? They have been working at Mr. Stewart for months. And there are we, cramped up without a decent place to wash up the dishes in; and obliged to turn the wood-house into a coal-hole, merely because it is Farmer Kemp's fancy that his carter should have two bed-rooms."

"Mr. Richardson was over at Sandcombe talking about it, when I was staying there last," said Jessie. "William Grant has two or three cottages of his own, hasn't he, Ursie? I knew Mr. Richardson was begging him to see about adding to them, and Leah got angry; and, when he was gone, said she wished clergymen would keep to their business of writing sermons, and not trouble themselves with matters which didn't concern them. By the bye, Ursie," and Jessie spoke out quite brightly, as having escaped from a tiresome subject, "do you know of any girl that will suit Leah, to help in the dairy? She told me if I happened to see you I was to ask. She talked of coming over herself about it; the girls she has had lately have turned out so badly."

"They all turn out badly for that matter," said Jane; "it is in their nature, father says; and he never expects anything better."

"So Leah says," continued Jessie. "She declares they have no sense of what is decent, and that there is no keeping them in order. Remember, Ursie, I have asked; so it is off my conscience." Jessie stood up and put on her bonnet.

Jane waited still. She had a quick ear, and I suspect she caught the sound of the voices in the parlour, and thought Roger and Mr. Hervey were coming in; and so they were. Their conversation had been much longer than was proposed, and it did not seem to have been very pleasant, to judge by their looks.

"Good evening to you, Mr. Hervey," said Jane, going up to him. "I did not expect to see you, though I might have done so; you are here so often."

"Business, Miss Shaw," replied Mr. Hervey, quickly, and a little sharply; "it must be attended to, you know. I won't stay now, Ursie," he added, speaking to me,—he always called me Ursie, having known me from a child,—"as you have company."

"Nay," I answered, "you must have some tea; I have been keeping it hot for you; and Jessie and Jane Shaw have finished, and they are going to walk over the hill to Hatton."

Roger had been standing by the window, thinking. He turned round then, and said, "I am going to Sandcombe; if they would wait a few minutes, I might see them part of the way; and, Ursie, you could come, too."

It was a temptation. I seldom had a quiet walk with Roger, except on Sundays; and I was not sorry to keep Jessie from being alone with Jane Shaw, though it might be only for half an hour.

Jane tossed her bonnet off, and laughed, and said she was always willing to have good company; and, since they were to be a merry party, it would be as well for Mr. Hervey to join them, "Unless he has business elsewhere," she added, with mischief in her look.

I did not expect Mr. Hervey to agree, but he did, without requiring any pressing, and I felt quite cross with him, thinking how soon a man could be taken in by a forward woman. He and Roger drank up their tea quickly, and scarcely ate anything, saying they would wait for supper. I left Jessie to take my place, and pour out the last cups of tea, and went to put on my things; and when I came down again, I found that Jane had possession of Mr. Hervey, and was trying to find out from him all she could about Mr. Weir, when he was expected, and why he didn't come. She took it for granted that he knew all, and I saw from his manner that there was more in his mind than he chose to tell; but he warned her off admirably, not letting her know anything he chose to keep to himself, and yet joking all the time, so that she could not be angry.

CHAPTER XI.

We were to have separated when we reached the top of the down, at the end of the turf road, but the evening was so pleasant we were tempted to go on farther, instead of turning down to Sandcombe. It was Jane who proposed it; she said we might cross the down to Hatton lane, and then Jessie and she would soon be at home. Roger was doubtful; and whilst Jane was standing urging him, Mr. Hervey whispered to me, "Can't you come on, Ursie? I have a word to say to you."

I walked on a few paces, being sure Roger would follow; Mr. Hervey and I kept in front. He did not speak till we were at some distance from the others; then he said, "You are not likely to be startled at news as some people are, so I may as well tell you at once that there is trouble coming, and that Roger may be wishing you to leave Dene."

"Trouble upon us—money trouble!" I exclaimed, and I felt my heart sink, in spite of what Mr. Hervey had said.

"Not trouble upon you, and not money trouble, at least as far as you are concerned," he replied. "But I told Roger I should like to have a little conversation with you, and show you part of my mind upon the subject, as regards Mrs. Weir, and he was willing I should, though as yet we don't see matters quite alike."

"He is going over to Sandcombe to talk to William," I said.

"Yes; he trusts him as a prudent man, which is natural and right; and he would save you, if he could, from things which might give you pain. But you are not one to care for pain, if by bearing it you can be a comfort to any one."

"And by staying with Mrs. Weir I may be a comfort to her," I said. I seemed to understand it all in an instant.

"A woman is a help to a woman, let her be who she may; and Mrs. Weir has been very kind to you, Ursie."

"Very," I said; "I never had a better friend."

"And she needs a return," he continued. "Ursie, did you ever hear Mrs. Weir's history?"

"Only by bits. Mrs. Mason has let out a little, and some things I have guessed at."

"Some things are clear as daylight," said Mr. Hervey sadly; "but there is a good deal behind which only a few know, which I should never have known, but that my father was Mr. Weir's bailiff, and had a great deal to do with his affairs, and his father's before him, and so we have become, as it were, part of the family. If I tell you now, Ursie, it is not that you may talk about it all, only that you may be the more inclined to be kind and understanding."

"Of course," I said; "it will all be buried as in the grave, except with Roger."

Mr. Hervey paused for a moment; then he said, "You know that Mrs. Weir is a second wife?"

"Yes," I replied, "and I was told also that the first Mrs. Weir had less money than her husband expected."

"So it was said," he replied; "but she left him enough to give cause for his being considered rich, in spite of his extravagant habits; and, as perhaps you know, our Mrs. Weir brought him money also. She was a Miss Mayne, and not above nineteen when she first knew Mr. Weir; very lovely, like a little fairy, I have heard my father say; one can easily fancy that from what she is now. She had money of her own, left her by her grandmother, and she was made a great deal of,—spoilt indeed by having everything she wished for; naturally she was full of fancies, and, being delicate, they humoured her in them; and because there was money at hand to buy everything, there seemed no reason, at first sight, why she should not have what she wanted. Poor thing! she has lived to know that there are some things which no money can buy."

"And did she marry Mr. Weir when she was only nineteen?" I asked.

"No! When she knew him first she was in love with somebody else; a young gentleman named Henderson. He was a clerk in one of the public offices in London, and likely to rise in the world, but he had nothing of his own then except his salary. Every one saw they were attached to each other. The parents put no obstacles in the way of their meeting, and I believe there was a kind of understanding

that if they both continued in the same mind they were after a while to be married."

"And why did they not marry?" I asked.

"Because Mr. Weir came in the way. I suppose he must really have taken a fancy to Miss Mayne, for he proposed to her only eight months after his first wife's death."

"Enough to make her refuse him at once," I exclaimed.

"And so she would have refused him, no doubt, if she had been left to herself," replied Mr. Hervey. "But her father interfered. He liked the notion of a rich son-in-law better than a poor one, and what was more, he was a selfish man, and as it turned out afterwards, had involved himself in difficulties, out of which Mr. Weir undertook to help him, and so poor little Miss Mayne was sacrificed."

"It is all very well to say," I replied; "but it never seems to me that any woman is justified in marrying a man whom she cannot love, let her parents urge it ever so much."

"Well! you are right," answered Mr. Hervey; "but when a person is put on the rack one must not be severe in one's judgment; and, from what I have heard, they set poor little Miss Mayne on a kind of rack. False stories of young Henderson were brought to her, and she was made to believe he was going to marry some one else; and that, and her father's urging, and Mr. Weir's attentions,—for he knew well enough how to make himself agreeable,—at last won her over."

"And did Mr. Henderson say nothing for himself?" I inquired.

"They managed it all when he was out of the way. He had been sent abroad for a time on some matter of public business, and whilst he was absent the affair was settled."

"But he might have written," I said.

"They took good care that his letters should never reach her; yet she did hear from him at last. A note from him was given her, I have been told, on the day of her marriage, just as she came back from church. You can fancy, Ursie, what a wedding-party that was. My mother watched the carriage drive through the town, when Mr. and Mrs. Weir went off on their journey, and anything so ghastly as Mrs. Weir's face she has said she never beheld."

"Poor thing!" I exclaimed; "I wonder how she could bear it. I should have died."

"Life is made of tougher threads than you think, Ursie," said Mr. Hervey, "and I suppose we all in a way grow used to our sorrows. Just at first, too, Mr. Weir was not unkind to his wife; she lived near her home, and had her old friends about her, so there was a good deal to soften her lot."

"But Mr. Weir is not kind to her now," I observed.

"No; he grew jealous without the slightest cause, except that he knew his wife had been attached to young Henderson. They met—Mr. Henderson and Mrs. Weir, I mean—for the first time at some gay party in London, and though I have heard it said again and again that no one could find the least thing to blame in their manner to each other, yet no doubt Mr. Weir perceived that there was pain on both sides. And so he grew angry and irritable, and I dare say she, having been spoilt, was not always wise in her mode of dealing with him."

"She may not have been wise," I said, "but she must always have meant rightly."

"Everybody believed that of her. But Mr. Weir is a strange man, Ursie. If he dislikes or suspects once, there is no overcoming the prejudice. And so he deliberately set himself—at least, that is what people declare—to ruin young Henderson."

"Wretch!" I exclaimed.

"Not far short of it," replied Mr. Hervey. "I have that opinion of him, Ursie, that, but for the sake of Mrs. Weir, I would never have done an hour's business for him. But I dare say he would make a good excuse for himself; it was all in the way of law, and therefore he called it justice. Mr. Weir was engaged in some speculations,—he is always speculating,—and in the course of them, he and young Henderson were mixed up in the same concern. Henderson was not a good man of business, and ignorantly entered into some engagements which he could not conveniently keep. He begged for time; and there was no doubt that with time he would have overcome his difficulties. But his relations were poor, and he had no one to help him. Mr. Weir urged the person with whom he was connected to press him. Hender-

son was in despair, for he was a strictly honourable man, and at last he ventured to write to Mrs. Weir and ask her to intercede. There was an allusion in this letter to past days, but not a word which might not have been published in the market-place. Yet Mr. Weir's anger was terrible. They say that Mrs. Weir even went so far as to beg him on her knees to be merciful; but his answer was that not an angel from Heaven should persuade him, and he kept his word."

"And was Mr. Henderson ruined?" I exclaimed.

"Yes. His friends came forward at the last with offers of help, but it was too late. His agony of mind, aggravated no doubt by all he had gone through before, brought on a brain fever, and he died."

Silence followed for some seconds.

Then I said, "She stayed with her husband still?"

"For better for worse," replied Mr. Hervey. "There is no other choice."

"I must have left him," I exclaimed. "There could be no law to bid one stay with such a monster."

"Mrs. Weir was wiser than you, Ursie," he continued; "she knew well enough that peace is only to be found in the way of duty. But that grief made her what she is. It wrecked her health and prevented her from paying attention to her child. It shook her mind in a certain way,—or rather, I should say, it so affected her nerves, that for a time she seemed stunned, and unable to take in common affairs. She has recovered in a measure, but the bodily weakness remains, and you must have remarked yourself, that she seldom speaks like a person who has an interest in this world's concerns. Only now and then, when any special case is brought before her, if one is with her alone, her vigour of character seems to return."

"I should scarcely have said she had any vigour naturally," I observed.

"You are mistaken then; she has a great deal. It shows itself now in a singular way: one might suppose that she would have become neglectful of her husband after he had shown such disregard to her feelings; but, on the contrary, she is, as you must know, even morbidly anxious to be obe-

dient to him. Conscience, particularly as regards him, seems the only thing which is left thoroughly alive in him."

"Perhaps," I said, "she feels that she deceived him by the very act of marrying him."

"It may be so," he replied. "At any rate, duty to her husband is the one ruling object of her life now: not its motive though, Ursie; there is no heart in what she does—how can there be?"

"How indeed!" I replied: "but," I added, as I thought of Miss Milicent, "that must all have taken place many years ago."

"So many," answered Mr. Hervey, "that most persons have forgotten the circumstances, if they ever knew them; and Mrs. Weir is generally considered now only an eccentric, nervous invalid. Yet it is not her life only which has been affected by them, but Miss Milicent's also. She was allowed to go her own way, and at last became too much for her mother. She was clever and energetic, and Mr. Weir found her useful in many ways, and brought her forward, and at last she took up independent notions of her own, and quite looked down upon her parents."

"Not upon her father?" I said.

"Yes, upon them both; for she was quick enough, and good enough, I will say that for her, to see through Mr. Weir. It seems, Ursie, that when we put our hearts into our work it will tell in some way or other in the end, whatever blunders we may make. Sorrow, through God's grace, made Mrs. Weir very religious, and whatever else Miss Milicent might laugh at in her mother, she never laughed at that. Only, unfortunately, she made a bad use of the respect which she could not help feeling. She despised her mother for thinking too little of this world, and her father for thinking too little of the next."

"She has turned out to be disagreeable enough between the two," I said.

"Yes; though there is better stuff in her than you might fancy: but she is not likely to be much comfort to either if trouble should come; which is the reason, Ursie, why I wanted you to be near Mrs. Weir, if it could be, at least for a time. She would have more help from you than she would ever get from her daughter."

"But what is coming?" I asked quickly.

"That is what I can't say," he replied. "I am not at liberty; and I don't want to urge you against anything which Roger and William may consider right: but they will be likely to think most of you, and I want you to think a little of Mrs. Weir. I told Roger I should say this to you, and he did not object."

"I will stand by her through everything," I exclaimed. "She has been as kind to me as a mother."

"And you won't repent it," he replied. "There is great comfort in this world in being able to help those who can't help themselves."

I answered heartily, "Yes," and I felt the colour rush to my cheek, whilst my heart beat very fast. I could have fought against an army just then in defence of Mrs. Weir.

Mr. Hervey laughed a little, and said he felt I was a host on any one's side; but I think he had deeper and sadder thoughts in his mind, for he stood still, thinking and looking grave, which was very unlike him, and quite started when Roger, and Jane, and Jessie came up bantering, and asking what made us keep so far ahead.

We were at Hatton Lane gate then, and there we were to part company. Mr. Hervey and I were a great contrast to the others. They were so merry, and Jessie said they had had a delightful walk. As she stood leaning by the gate, not willing, I could see, to go through, and saying good-bye to Mr. Hervey, I thought what a pretty picture she would make, and I made Roger remark her, and he looked pleased that I should notice her kindly, and said that she was too nice a girl to be left to Jane Shaw; he wished I would become her friend. I took but little notice of his words, for I had no thought to give to any one but Mrs. Weir.

CHAPTER XII.

Roger and I went back to Sandcombe alone. Mr. Hervey had some business at Compton, and walked home that way. William was out in the yard giving orders to one of his cart-

ers; but he left off directly he saw us, and made Roger go with him to look at a new threshing machine which was just put up. He told me I should find Leah in the house; so I went in.

I found her in the little parlour, alone and working. I think she was not sorry to be interrupted, for she was very gracious, and wondered why I had not been to see her lately.

I told her I had been busy, what with keeping the cottage in order, and cooking, and needlework, and that now the family were at Dene, there was more than usual to attend to.

"You should not make yourself a slave, Ursie," she replied. "Jane Shaw and I were talking about it the other day. She says, and I quite agree with her, that the Weirs treat you as nothing better than a servant, and that if you were to hold your head higher, you might have as much respect paid you as she has."

"A little more, I hope," was my answer.

"You need not be so proud, Ursie. I don't see what right you have to look down upon the Shaws in the way you do; it is not at all fitting for a girl of your age."

"I don't want to look down upon any one," I replied; "it is the Shaws who look down upon me. And, you know," I added, laughing, "if people will walk about in stilts, one is forced to do the same to be even with them."

"The Shaws are higher in the world than you are, or are ever likely to be, whilst you live shut up at Dene," continued Leah. "I don't mean to approve of all Jane does; I told her the other day that she went into Hove too often, and made herself too much noticed by her smart dress."

"Yet you don't object to Jessie's going with her," I said.

"Jessie's doings are not my concern," replied Leah. (It was not strictly true, for she really had more control over Jessie than any one.) "Not but what if they were, I doubt if I should think it wise to stop her, when every now and then she has the chance of a little pleasure. She must look out for herself. She will have to make her way in the world, and we must give her the opportunity of gaining friends."

"Or a husband," I said, sharply.

But Leah was not put out. "Yes, or a husband! It would be a very good thing for Jessie to be married,—there is no doubt of that;—and she is more likely to meet with persons who will take to her if she is allowed to see a little of the world, than if she stays all the year at Hatton."

Leah said this so boldly that, for the instant, I was caught by her words, and felt she might have truth on her side; but a second thought brought me round to my former mind.

"For twenty husbands," I said, "I would not go to Hove on a Saturday, to flaunt about the streets with Jane Shaw, and have all the idle folks in the country gossiping about me."

"You are jealous, Ursie," said Leah, with some meaning. "Jane Shaw is handsome enough and clever enough to have persons going after her who would never look at you."

"Very likely," I said, carelessly, not choosing to show that I was annoyed; though I must own that, as Leah spoke, I glanced at the old mirror over the fireplace to see if I was really so plain that no one would ever look at me.

"We won't talk about it," said Leah, in a quiet, provoking tone, which I knew meant that it was not worth while to argue with me. "You will be sorry some day for your bitterness against the Shaws. Is Roger come over upon any particular business?"

"I think he is," I replied. "We walked over the down to Hatton Gate before we came here, with Jane Shaw, and Mr. Hervey, and Jessie; and, now I think of it, Leah, Jessie asked me to recommend you a girl for the dairy if I could. Is Kitty Hobson going away?"

I said this rather to divert Leah's attention from Roger's business; and it served my purpose. She answered quickly, "Kitty went yesterday; she turned out good for nothing, and I could not keep her. It is the case with them all. I wonder sometimes what is the good of all the learning the girls get at school; it does not teach one in twenty to be respectable."

I could not help thinking there might be some fault in the teaching of the girls after they left school. Leah had

only lately sent away an upper servant who was a great deal worse than idle, and whose character she well knew, but whom she kept because of her cleverness. Kitty Hobson had been under her, and no doubt had learnt much evil from her.

I hesitated, and then I said, "Kitty must have had a bad example since she left school."

"No doubt," said Leah, misunderstanding me. "Her parents are people of no thought, and the cottage is a perfect pig-stye; and they live altogether more like pigs than human beings. As for Kitty, she never had a notion of behaving like a decent girl. Martha says it was a disgrace to be with her. If Mr. Richardson would look after his school, and not spend his time in planning new cottages, we shouldn't hear the tales of Compton that we do."

"It must be a hard matter to learn decent habits when they are all crowded together in that fashion," I said; "how many in a room are there?"

"Hobson, and his wife, and Kitty, and Charles, and the baby. Lately, they have put Henry Hobson to sleep in the little out-house."

"And it is William's cottage, isn't it?" I asked.

"Yes; more's the pity. Mr. Richardson was over here last week talking to William, in a way that I thought very impertinent, about building another room, and at last William was quite put out with him, and said plainly that it was no use doing anything for people like the Hobsons. He might have said that it was no use giving money to Mr. Richardson's school. He told me afterwards, indeed, that he had more than half a mind to withdraw his subscription, —you know we pay five shillings a-year to Compton school;—and I think he will be right since Kitty Hobson has turned out so badly, for it's a shame to think that she was brought up there."

Leah always had right on her side, in her own opinion, but I could not help feeling for Mrs. Hobson, who was a hardworking woman, and not at all strong, and I secretly made up my mind that I would go and see her, and inquire into the story before long. Perhaps, between Mrs. Richardson and the Kemps, something might be done to give

Kitty a helping hand, for I only understood, from what Leah said, that she was unsteady and careless in her habits.

Leah was peculiar in her ways of management in all these matters. She allowed things to go on as they might for a long time, and then suddenly, without warning, a girl was turned off. I felt with her that it would not do to keep one who was not well-conducted, and I had often wondered at the carelessness which some of the farmers' wives showed about their servants, but I did think that some pains ought to be taken first to bring them into the right way. Leah saw that I took a different view of the case from her, and it made her cross. She said, pettishly, that she wondered what William and Roger could have to talk about so long, she should go and see, and she left the room.

I felt very sad when I was left alone; what Mr. Hervey had told me about Mrs. Weir rested in my mind, and I had a feeling that changes and trouble were coming upon me. But even more than this, it always put me in low spirits—at least as far as anything could, for I was very cheerful naturally—to be at Sandcome.

There was something about it which so often brought to my mind the story of the rich man and Lazarus. How William would have laughed if I had said so to him! He, rich?—why, he believed himself to be just struggling to keep his head above water. A high rent to give for his land, upon which sums of money had been spent, his stock to be kept up, his labourers to be paid; to say nothing of taxes, enough to ruin a man—land-tax, and poor-rate, and church-rate, and taxes for houses and servants—it was absurd to speak of being rich! And besides, if he was well off one year, who was to answer for the next? Everything depended upon the weather, which, if it did well for one crop, was sure to do badly for another. What was good for hay was bad for turnips,—that every one knew. To hear William talk, you would have thought it was only by a miracle he was saved from the workhouse. But, in spite of all, the Bible story would return to me. There was Leah, after her day's work, sitting at ease in her comfortable little parlour, having had a good dinner and tea, and expecting

a good supper; finding for herself just employment enough to prevent time from hanging heavy on her hands—for there was a new bonnet lying on the table, with the ribbon beside it with which it was to be trimmed—no one to interrupt her; people about her willing to do what she told them; a nice little chaise ready to take her where she liked to go; a cart and a waggon ready to be sent for whatever she chose to order; a husband whose great fault and misfortune was that he let her have her own way. If it was not being rich, it was being quite comfortable without riches.

But it was all very proper and respectable; there was no sin in it. I never heard, though, that the rich man in the parable committed any great sin: he only let Lazarus lie at his gate.

Kitty Hobson, however, was not like Lazarus; she was good for nothing, so Leah said. Why was Leah to trouble herself about her? Why might not Kitty be sent back to her home, to sleep in the little loft with her father, and brother, and mother, and the baby? What matter was it to Leah that the girl could not learn decent habits if she wished it? She was good for nothing already, What was the use of trying to keep her from becoming worse? When Leah lay down to sleep on her soft bed in the wholesome atmosphere of her large room, why need she vex herself with thinking of the little crowded attic in which five living beings were to pass the night? If the rain pelted against the window, why need she remember that there was a hole in the roof of Hobson's cottage, and that the drops would fall upon Kitty's bed? If the wind blew, there were shutters and a curtain at Sandcombe Farm, the walls were thick, and the crevices carefully stopped. That was comfort for Leah; and as for Kitty Hobson, she was accustomed to the breezes of summer and the storms of winter, for the cottage was so old that it was more worth William's while to let it tumble to pieces than to attempt to mend it.

And then, if Kitty was worthless, it was no use to think of improving her. It might do Leah some good to say her prayers, for she could kneel down quietly, and think seriously of what she was about; but what was the good of talking to Kitty about prayers and the Bible? She had no doubt

given up any right practice she might have learnt at school. There would be her father talking to her mother when she could have prayed; or the baby crying, or Charles complaining that he could not go to sleep; and when she got up in the morning it would be the same, or rather worse, for they must all be dressing in the same room, huddling on their clothes, crying out for breakfast, and scolding Kitty because the fire was not lighted. If she had wished to say her prayers, she could not possibly have found a quiet moment or a quiet place. But she did not want it,—she was good for nothing!

Leah might have been right; but I thought of the rich man, nevertheless.

William came in alone, after I had been about ten minutes by myself. He sat down in his large elbow-chair, as though he was tired, and laid his hands upon his knees, and thought for some seconds. Presently he said, "Hard times, Ursie, aren't they?"

"I am sorry you find them so," I replied; "I don't know that they are so particularly hard at Dene."

"Just what I have been saying to Roger," he replied. "When you have a certain sum coming in, be it ever so small, you are better off than running a risk, as one must in taking a farm."

"Is that what Roger thinks?" I inquired, hastily. "He is come over with some plan, I know."

"Roger has the Canada fancy again," replied William; and he fixed his eyes upon me keenly, to see by my face what I felt.

My colour may have changed; I won't say that it did not. But I was upon my guard to conceal my feelings: whatever they were, they were to be told to Roger first. So I answered quietly, "Has he? He never told me about it."

"Then he had better come and tell you now," said William; and he rose up slowly from his chair and went into the kitchen, and called Roger and Leah, who were talking together outside the house.

I sat still. I would not appear impatient or put out; but my heart grew sick, and a pang went through it; for I felt that Roger had not treated me kindly.

Roger stepped into the room first; and before I could make up my mind to look up and speak to him, I felt his hand laid upon my shoulder, and heard him say, in a tone which he tried to make light, "There's nothing settled yet, Trot; so don't be cast down."

"I had rather hear it all from you, Roger," I said, reproachfully. "You shouldn't leave others to tell me."

"I didn't mean it, Ursie; I didn't mean it. It is a thought just of an hour,—nothing more,—and it may go to the winds before to-morrow."

"But I may be spoken to plainly," I replied; "I am not a child, and I can bear things."

"Bravely, Ursie. Not a woman in England better," said Roger; "and you should have heard it all before night; only William let the cat out of the bag."

"I was rather curious to see how she would take it, I must own," said William.

"Ursie is a sensible woman," said Leah, sharply.

People always say one is sensible when they are going to give particularly disagreeable advice.

"If you will speak out," I said, "I will show whether I am sensible or not. What do you all want me to do?"

"Stay and live here with us, if Roger goes to Canada," said Leah, bluntly. And Roger bowed his head upon his hands, for it seemed he dared not look at me.

I don't think I answered directly; but when I did, I know that my voice sounded, even to myself, quite changed.

"I thank you, Leah, for speaking out," I said. "I will do what Roger wishes. If I am to be a help to him, I will go; if I am to be a hindrance, I will stay;—not here," I added, quickly, for Leah was going to praise me for agreeing with her;—"I will do something to be independent; if there is nothing else, I will go to service."

William uttered a low whistle of surprise. Roger only took my hand, and held it very tight.

"Then you will be the first of the Grants that ever so demeaned herself," said Leah.

"Better come with me, Ursie, than do that," said Roger, in a low voice.

"Yes, better indeed," I exclaimed vehemently, "a thou-

sand times better, Roger, go with you to the world's end, than stay behind to be a queen. And why mustn't I go? I have hands and health, and care nothing for hardships. I will work to the last hour that God gives me strength; why mustn't I go?"

"Because it's all a chance," said William, "and Roger knows it. He may just as likely be a ruined man as a rich one."

"Then we will be ruined together," I exclaimed.

"That wouldn't help me, Ursie," said Roger; and he looked up at me with what tried to be a smile, but it was not one.

"I don't see that there is a question of ruin for any one," exclaimed Leah, rather contemptuously. "Roger has money to set out with if he chooses to go, and no doubt he will do better at first alone. What is to come after, may be left, if Ursie won't ride the high horse, and be too proud to find a home with her own brother."

"I am not too proud," I said hastily," and I have proved it. Who has been Roger's servant up to this time? and who will continue so to his dying day if he will only say yes?"

"A man who sets out as a colonist can't afford to keep a servant," said William. "If Roger is bent upon this wild plan, he must go alone, Ursie."

I couldn't understand William's tone at all. I had fancied before that he upheld Roger's notion. He was going to say more, when Roger started from his seat and stood up before me. The sadness in his face was gone, and he looked like himself, fit and willing to brave the world. "We have not been fair upon you, Ursie," he said; "you have been taken by surprise. We should have talked this matter over alone, and we will do it now. Leah, you have been kind in offering a helping hand; and thank you for it. Good night, William; you shall hear more about this to-morrow." He walked out of the room, and through the passage into the yard, not once looking round to see if I was following him. William seemed thoroughly vexed. Leah was only rather grave; she just said, "I hope, Ursie, whatever you resolve upon, you will consider the credit of the family," and then she let me depart.

CHAPTER XIII.

INSTEAD of turning into the turf road to Dene, Roger said, when we reached it, "The moon will be up in a few minutes, Ursie; we might get to the top of St. Anne's and look at it." These were the first words he had spoken, and I had not interrupted his silence. I felt that he wanted time to set himself right. That conversation had for some reason or other disturbed him, more almost than I should have expected. And it was a quieting walk along the ridge of the down; it was growing very dark, but the sky was clear, and one or two stars were to be seen gleaming very faintly. I could just distinguish between the trees, the Abbey Farm, and a dark spot which I knew must be the tower of Compton Church; and out in the distance, where there was a glowing sheet of yellow light along the horizon, the white cliffs stood up mistily, their outline mixing with the sky.

"Now, Ursie, give me your hand," said Roger, as we stood at the foot of St. Anne's Hill. The way was steep; he dragged me up after him, taking care to avoid the chalk-pit, and every now and then bidding me stop to rest—though I scarcely needed it. When we reached the Oratory, he made me lean against the wall. The moon had risen, though as yet it cast no reflection; but a pale light was spread over the vast expanse of waters, and white curling waves could be seen dashing upon the shingles, and scattering their spray into the air. Roger took off his hat, and passed his hand across his forehead.

"We may well look at the sea, Ursie," he said; "it will be the highroad between us before long."

"Never," I answered firmly; "my mind is made up, Roger."

"But not mine. William is right; it is a risk."

"Then William should not urge you to go," I said.

"He does not. You heard him call it a wild notion; he thinks I can stay at Dene."

"And why can't you? We have one lot in life, Roger; I ought to know."

"Mr. Weir is a ruined man; or if he is not now, he must be before many weeks are over. John Hervey knows it, and came to tell me of it. Does it startle you, Ursie?" and he put his arm round me, and drew me close to him, and kissed me.

"No," I answered, "it does not startle me; nothing that I could hear of Mr. Weir would. But his wife—Miss Milicent,"—my heart was full, I could not say more; and John Hervey's story and my own words came to my mind reproachfully.

"It's bitter enough for them," he said; "but we must think of ourselves, Ursie; or, at least, I am bound to think of you."

"And we can't help them?" I said.

"Not without doing ourselves harm, so far as I can see now. At least, I can't."

"But I can, and that is what Mr. Harvey meant," I said, "when he talked to me."

"John Hervey is against your going with me," was his answer. "Whatever he may have said about Mrs. Weir is only second in his thoughts; his first notion is that you are safer in England, at least for a while. William and Leah,—they all think so."

"And Roger thinks what?" I said; and I leaned my hand upon his shoulder, and partly raised myself, that I might look into his face, and see clearly what he meant.

"Roger is a fool!" he said, in a husky voice. "Ursie, I can't live alone."

All the love which had been lying deep in my heart for years seemed, at that moment, to gather itself up into one overwhelming torrent. "Let the whole world be against me, and I will go!" I exclaimed: "God made us brother and sister; He taught us to love one another, and it can't be His will that we should part."

He pressed me to him more closely, but he did not answer.

"Is it not true?" I continued eagerly. "Have you anything to say against it? If God has joined us together, why are we to be put asunder?"

"That is said of husband and wife, not of brother and sister," he replied.

"And if I were your wife, you would take me with you?"

"I should feel it my duty," was the answer.

It was my turn then to be silent; neither of us, indeed, spoke for some seconds. At last I said, bitterly, "A wife couldn't love you better that I do, Roger!"

"May be not," he replied. The words must have struck him as cold, for he added, "You love me a thousand times more than I deserve, Ursie, but that is no reason why I am to take advantage of you to lead you into hardships."

"I shall walk into them with my eyes open," I replied. "I am not a girl now, I am a woman; I know what I can bear—everything, Roger, except that you shouldn't love me."

"Then you have little enough to fear in life," he said; "but, Ursie, it won't do to think only of our love. There is a safer rule, though not such a pleasant one,—what we can afford."

"I shall be no expense to you," I replied; "and every one knows how useful a woman is in a new country."

"Yes, in some ways; but it is all an experiment. If I take you, I must pay your passage, and fit you out, and all our travelling will be doubled, and I must be more careful as to lodging. If I go by myself, I may find a shelter anywhere, I shall not care where I am; but if I have you with me, I shall never bear that you should want comforts; and then, if the scheme should fail, there will be the expense of coming back again."

"Then why go at all, if it is to fail?" I said, rather perversely.

"Because it's the best opening a man in my circumstances can have."

"And if you were married, you would still go, and take your wife?"

"Even so; a family man has a much better chance in a new country than an old one."

"But you are not married, and you have no family."

"No reason why I mayn't be married some day, you know, Trot," and he laughed.

"No reason," I answered quietly; but it seemed that a dagger went through my heart.

I don't know whether Roger suspected it, but he went on: "There is no good in looking on into the future, Trot; we have lived very happily hitherto, and, please God, we will be happy yet. My wife's wedding clothes are not made, nor likely to be; and, in the meantime, there is nothing I want but Ursie: and if all goes well, by this time twelvemonth I may be writing to you from over the sea, asking you to come to me; and then I don't think you will say no. And you know," he added, "that a wife, if I had one, couldn't take up so much room but what there would always be a corner for you."

He was a man; he did not know a woman's heart, and he thought he had comforted me by those words.

"Then it is settled; you are going," I answered; I could not bring myself to say thank you for what he had been offering me.

"Not at all settled," he replied; "it depends partly upon William, and getting the money together. You know now a good deal is laid out upon his farm, and I don't want to put him to inconvenience. That is one reason why I said nothing to you; I felt the plan might never come to anything; and there was no use in troubling you before the time."

"You would not have treated your wife so," I said, reproachfully. He was very quick at catching any change in my voice.

"Oh, Ursie!—jealous!" He laughed, and patted me on the back, as though I had been a child.

My pride was touched; and I drew back from him. "I only wish," I said, "to have common trust placed in me. If I am worth anything, Roger, I am worth that; and I have never kept back a thought from you."

"Nor I from you, Ursie," he answered, gravely. "It shouldn't have been so now if I had guessed for a moment that you would take it to heart. As to a wife, the notion is too silly to talk about. Twenty wives wouldn't do for me what my little Trot has done." And then he gave me what I used to call one of his bear's hugs, and I prayed him to be merciful; and said, laughing, yet being more inclined to cry, that I wouldn't wish him a worse punishment than one wife; for he did not know the least about women's ways, and he had been quite spoilt.

"True, perhaps, Ursie," he said, thoughtfully; and I felt comforted, though not happy.

We stood together for some minutes afterwards, watching the glimmering of the moonlight which was just beginning to mark a path upon the sea. I think we were both glad to forget for a while that there was anything else to be thought about. The light streamed doubtfully at first, seeming to catch only the crests of the waves; and then a cloud passed, and it was quite hidden, and a deep shadow rested upon the water; from which, after a few minutes, broke forth at intervals glittering lines and bright islands of pale glory, till at length once more the moon rose high and clear; and the broad sparkling pathway was traced in one unbroken flood of silvery light across the ocean.

"Do you see it, Ursie?" said Roger; and he pointed to a tiny vessel making its way across the Ocean. "How lonely it looks!"

"Not lonely," I said; "there is another following it. Now they are coming into the light; they are close together." I heard Roger sigh.

"They are going in the same direction," I added; "they must be bound for the same port. If storms come they will help each other. You would not part them, Roger?"

"It is growing very late, Ursie, we must be going," was his only answer. We left the shelter of the ruined Oratory; and as the cold breeze was felt on the open hill, Roger said earnestly, "I shouldn't feel the chill, Ursie, if you were not here to share it. It may be better to be lonely after all."

CHAPTER XIV.

I was awakened next morning by a loud knocking at the cottage door. It must have been about half-past five o'clock, for I was very sound asleep, and I always woke by myself before six. I waited to hear if Roger would move, and not hearing him, I supposed he must have dressed and gone out before, and as quickly as I could I went down-stairs myself, thinking that most likely it was Fanny come over from the house for something she wanted.

When I opened the door I saw not Fanny but Miss Milicent. "Why didn't you come, Ursie," she said; "I have been knocking till I was tired. You are wanted; my mother has had a bad night, and says she must see you directly. It is too bad for a girl like you to lie in bed so long." Miss Milicent, I suppose, thought that because I worked harder I needed less sleep than she did. I could see she was like myself, only just out of bed, for she had wrapped a loose kind of man's great coat round her, the sleeves hanging down helplessly on each side; and some locks of very dishevelled black hair escaped from under her garden-bonnet. I had learned to answer her, I am afraid, a little in her own tone; so I said, "Does Mrs. Weir want me before I am dressed, Miss Milicent?"

"She wants you at once; I have been up with her half the night. Why weren't you at home last evening? she wanted you then."

"I had business at Sandcombe," I said; "I am sorry Mrs. Weir wanted me last night, but I will be over as soon as I can be now."

"And I shall wait for you," said Miss Milicent; "but mind what you say to her, Ursie; she can't bear to be contradicted; you mustn't put her out, or she will be worse."

Miss Milicent made her way into the parlour, and I went up-stairs again to dress as quickly as I could. It was not very unusual for me to be called in this way, though it was seldom quite so early. They all knew I was an early riser, and Mrs. Weir every now and then sent for me the first thing to do something for her which she could not trust to her daughter. I must confess that she was at times a little given to whimsies. But Miss Milicent's manner gave me an idea of something more than ordinary, and my conversation with John Hervey had frightened me about what was coming upon the family. I could not dress half as quickly as I wished, my hands shook so, and Miss Milicent called to me twice before I was ready. I would not go, however, without my prayers; they were a little shorter than usual, but they comforted me with the feeling that I had trusted myself and others to God's guidance for whatever might be coming upon us.

"I have been looking at your furniture, Ursie," said Miss Milicent, when I came down-stairs again. "Your room is crowded; that sofa would be much better round by the fireplace."

"Thank you, Miss Milicent, but it does very well where it is; it is never used; and Roger and I like to sit close to the fire ourselves when it is cold."

"If it's no use, why don't you get rid of it? you might sell it for as much as four pounds, and the money would be useful to you in many ways."

"I dare say it would," I answered, "but Roger and I like the sofa; it was my mother's."

I felt sorry when I had said the words. I always was sorry in those days, when I let out anything of feeling before Miss Milicent. I opened the door for her to go out, and she went on before me, not taking any heed to my observation. Before she reached the house she turned round and said, "If ever you want to part with the sofa, I think Mrs. Richardson would be likely to buy it of you; she wants one."

I do believe Miss Milicent meant it kindly, but it was beyond my patience to bear, or rather it would have been, if I had not made it part of my prayer to be able to put up with her. I answered, "Thank you," very shortly, and kept at a distance from her, that she might not have the opportuty of saying anything more. We went up-stairs to the lobby, and there something seemed to strike Miss Milicent, and she beckoned me to come to her into the peacock room.

There were the birds roosting on the trelliswork! Little they knew of the cares of life, and much I was inclined to envy them.

"I suppose, Ursie, it may be as well to tell you one thing," said Miss Milicent, throwing open the window and sitting down by it; for the room had been shut up some days. "My mother has had some uncomfortable news, and she may talk to you about it. But you are not to encourage her. It is nothing in which you or any one else can do any good. Just try to draw away her thoughts, and if she wants you to read a chapter in the Bible or so, I suppose you can stay for it."

I answered that I would willingly do what I could. I

had Roger's breakfast to get ready, and the kitchen-fire was not lighted, but I would remain to be a comfort to Mrs. Weir as long as was possible.

"Fanny can go over and light the fire," said Miss Milicent, "and she can get your brother's breakfast, too."

"Thank you," I replied, "but that would not quite suit Roger, I am afraid; I must go myself, if I can."

Miss Milicent sat considering, which was not at all common with her. Presently she said, "You are very much given to your own ways, Ursie Grant. It strikes me you might as well take a little thought for others. My mother has been very kind to you."

"Very indeed," I said; "I wish always to show my gratitude; I will do all I can for Mrs. Weir, but I am afraid I can't put aside Roger."

"It is not wise of you, Ursie. Some day he will put you aside when you aren't thinking of it."

"I am willing to wait till the day comes," I replied; "but we are wasting time, now, Miss Milicent."

Strange to say, that was a fact she needed often to be reminded of. Busy though she was from morning till night, she frittered away more time than any person I ever met with.

She stopped again in her persevering way, just as we came to Mrs. Weir's door, and said: "You know that when Roger Grant marries, you will be obliged to leave him."

"Yes," I said, very coolly; but if she had given me a blow, I could not have felt the proud colour rush to my cheek more quickly.

I opened the door of Mrs. Weir's room, and held it for Miss Milicent to pass, and in she went like a rush of wind, straight up to her mother's bed, and drew aside the curtain, without a word of preparation.

That was going against one of Mrs. Weir's peculiar fancies. She never liked to be looked at in bed, unless she was dressed for it, and had on her pretty white muslin dressing-gown, trimmed with lace, and her best cap. "I have been over to Ursie Grant, mother, and she is come—here she is." Miss Milicent pulled aside the curtain still farther.

"That will do, Milicent. The light troubles me." Mrs.

Weir's voice was very weak, and she drew the coverlid over her face.

"It's only because you keep the room so dark always, mother," replied Mis Milicent. "If you would leave off having the shutters closed at night, you wouldn't be so fidgety. Ursie can't see to read, nor to do anything in this owl's light."

"I wish to talk a little to Ursula, alone, Milicent. I beg you to leave us. Is Ursula there?"

I drew near, and as I did so, managed to draw the curtain so as partly to hide Mrs. Weir, and make her feel that I was not looking at her. Miss Milicent flustered about the room (it is the only word I know to express what I mean), putting the chairs straight, and moving things from the dressing-table.

"I wish to be quiet, Milicent. I should like those things to be left," said Mrs. Weir, plaintively.

"You can't see, mother; you went to bed in such a hurry last night, that Cotton had no time to put anything away."

Mrs. Weir resigned herself to her fate, and let her head fall back on the pillow.

"I will see to it all, Miss Milicent," I said, going up to her, "if you will just kindly leave it. Else I may be obliged to go back to Roger before Mrs. Weir has had time to talk to me."

"Well, yes! I settled that Fanny should go over and light the fire. I shall call her and tell her so."

A most happy thought! It took Miss Milicent away, and she departed, slamming the door so violently, that I observed poor Mrs. Weir put her hand to her head, showing that the noise gave her pain. We heard Miss Milicent about the house for at least ten minutes afterwards, up-stairs and down-stairs, ordering one and another. No matter whom she had to meet, there was the great coat, with its helpless hanging sleeves, and the garden-bonnet to cover her.

Mrs. Weir waited for some seconds to assure herself that the room was free from Miss Milicent's presence, after which, she said, "Now, Ursula, if you please, sit down;" and I placed a chair just behind the curtain, and sat down. "Thank you for coming," she continued. "I should have preferred not

sending to you till after I had had my breakfast, but Milicent desired it."

"Miss Milicent thought I should be able to do something for you, Ma'am," I said, "and I should be very glad if I could."

"You are very good, Ursula. I feel it. Will you kindly look for my other cap, and the little light shawl in the left-hand drawer; you know which I mean; and, perhaps, if it would not trouble you, you would just give me my hand-glass, and draw aside the window-curtain a little, a very little. Milicent would open the shutters quite, though I begged her not."

These were very common little duties. I had often performed them before, for Mrs. Weir was very thoughtful about her maid, and whenever she kept her up at night, took care that she should have time to rest in the morning. I gave her the glass, and the cap, and poured some water into a very pretty china basin, with a pattern of green leaves and acorns round it, and handed her the sweet-smelling soap, and the soft-fringed towel, feeling all the time as if I was waiting upon a child, or even something more tender and delicate—something which would be likely to break if one touched it; her little hands and arms were so thin and white, and her fingers so taper. She had but few grey hairs, and her complexion was still very transparent. I don't think she showed her age at all, except in the marks beneath her eyes.

"Now, my Eau de Cologne, if you please, Ursula; and I should like the little table to be brought nearer, and will you put the flowers so that I may look at them? and the purple morocco Testament. I thank you; that is quite right; no one ever does just what I wish as you do."

No one except Miss Milicent had known Mrs. Weir's ways as long as I, and it had taken me a good while to learn them. As for Miss Milicent, it was a matter of continued surprise to me, that she and her mother had not separated years before.

"I should like you to read to me, Ursula, but I am afraid to take up your time; perhaps I had better talk to you first."

"If you please, Ma'am," I said. And now that Mrs.

Weir was in a measure dressed, I ventured to place my chair so that I might see her more plainly.

I noticed, then, that her eyes were heavy, and her eyelids red, showing that she had been crying, but she was trying to look happy. She was able to control herself wonderfully. I thought that, perhaps, if anything painful was to be said, it might be as well to let her prepare herself for it, so I offered to read the second morning lesson for the day. I knew that would soothe and give her strength more than anything I could suggest.

She listened with great reverence and attention, as was her wont, and when I had ended she said, "Thank you, Ursula, it has done me good. Whatever there is to bear, it will not be for long, and there is a bright hope beyond."

Then she paused, and the faint spot of colour in her cheek went and came, as it might have done in the face of a young person.

"You have heard bad news, Ma'am, I am afraid," I said, for I felt I must help her in spite of Miss Milicent's warning.

I was standing by the bed close to her. Poor Lady! she caught my hand, and looked piteously in my face, and then she leaned her head on my shoulder and cried like a child. And through her sobs came the words, "Ursula, my husband is gone, and we are ruined."

"Dear Ma'am, I heard something of it," I said, "but it may not be so bad as you think."

She drew herself away from me, and a flash shot from her eye. "They talk of us, then,—they pity us. But why should they not, Ursula?" and her voice was tremulous again. "We are all weak—weak—only mortals!"

"Roger had heard something, and Mr. Hervey, too," I replied, "but I don't fancy, Ma'am, the news is commonly known."

"It concerns Mr. Grant, Ursula," continued Mrs. Weir, her voice and manner becoming calmer. "Milicent says he must go away from Dene, and you also. She tells me we must live in a little cottage, and not keep any servant. I don't think I could live long if Milicent waited on me, but I must try; we must all try to do what God orders. Only, Ursula, you will come and see me sometimes?"

I meant not to be silly, and I used to think that I could always keep my tears in, but I broke down entirely then.

"Milicent told me last night all we should have to do," pursued Mrs. Weir. "When I could not go to sleep, she talked to me about it. I dare say it was right to look at the worst, and Milicent says she shall not care for having everything to arrange; but I think, Ursula, I might have slept better if I had been left quiet."

"Miss Milicent is strong," I said; "she does not understand what you require, Ma'am."

"Perhaps not, I know she said only what was true; but, Ursula, I should not vex myself with my own trials so much, if I knew more about my husband. Perhaps he is gone abroad; I ought to follow him. I ought to try and make him happier."

"I don't think you need trouble yourself about Mr. Weir, Ma'am," I began angrily; but she laid her hand upon my arm.

"I made a vow once, Ursula, to love, and honour, and obey him. You have never made such a vow. You cannot understand it. But it must be kept. Do you think Mr. Grant or Mr. Hervey would endeavour to find out where my husband is? I might join him then. I think I would rather do so than live in the little cottage with Milicent."

I could well understand that. Great self-sacrifice is always more easy than patient endurance. "You are not fit to go to him, Ma'am," I said, "if he is out of England. You would not be able to bear the hardships of travelling."

"We should travel till we found him," said Mrs. Weir. "Then we might take a house in some place where we were not known."

I felt whilst she spoke so easily of what might be done, how little she could know what ruin meant, and I was aware that I had but a slight notion of it myself. I could not picture Mrs. Weir living in any place without every comfort about her.

She continued, "I thought perhaps, Ursula, that you would come with us at first, if your brother would spare you; I told Milicent that I would ask you, but she laughed at the idea."

"Miss Milicent knows how many things I have to keep me at home, I am afraid, Ma'am," was my reply. It grieved me to say this, but she talked so like a child, fancying everything which she wished might be managed, that I saw it was necessary to show her the difficulties in her way. I could understand now why Miss Milicent had urged me to divert her mind instead of encouraging her to dwell upon her troubles. She looked very cast down, more I thought because I was so cold, than because I did not say yes; so I added, "Indeed, Ma'am, you must not think but that I would do everything for you I could, though it would be wrong to make any promise without consulting Roger, because he has plans of his own."

"You are very kind, Ursula. I don't want to be selfish. I told Milicent so. She thinks that we ought to stay in England. But Mr. Weir is my husband, I must not leave him. I should like to talk to Mr. Richardson about it. Do you think he would come to me? I shall pray to God, and He will direct me."

She was very nervous and agitated, and her voice shook painfully, though the words still followed each other slowly and formally in the quaint fashion which was common with her. I could do nothing for her myself, and the proposal of sending for Mr. Richardson took quite a weight from my mind.

She caught my hand as she supposed I was going away, and held it firmly. "You will pray for me, Ursula. I want to do my duty, and I think you will help me, and God will not forsake me. I must remember that; I shall see a way by and by. I hope you will never know so much trouble as I have; but I must go to my husband."

Those where the saddest words of all to me. There was no love in them, only a despairing sense of duty. I longed to ask her more particulars of what she had heard, but I remembered Miss Milicent's warning, and I felt also that it would be impertinent. Mrs. Weir was very kind in giving me her confidence, but I had no right to ask for more than she chose to tell.

"I must go to my husband," I heard her repeat again to herself, as I left the room, intending to see Miss Milicent,

and beg her to write to Mr. Richardson. This time the words sounded less sad. They came to me more as a lesson for myself. In her anxiety, her nervousness, and helplessness, Mrs. Weir had seized upon the one point which came before her as a duty. It was a landmark in her difficulties; and I knew that I must do the same. The weight pressed more heavily on my heart when I thought of Roger and Canada; for I could see fresh claims starting up to keep me at home. But there is a strength in duty; it is like nothing else. When troubles like quicksands are all around one, it is the firm spot on which to tread, and there is nothing so supporting to oneself as seeing others plant their feet upon it and stand up boldly. Poor Mrs. Weir had done more for me than I could ever do for her. I went back to her again for a little while, but I was doubtful whether it was good for her to have me much with her. Being with any one to whom she could open her heart, excited her. She spoke freely of the money difficulties, and said that she had foreseen them, but it was evident to me that her husband had never been open with her respecting them. About him she said very little. Never indeed, during the many years that I had known her, had she ever spoken directly or indirectly of the causes of complaint which she had against him. It was a sacred grief, known only to God.

I left her about seven o'clock, more quiet, and with a promise that she would try and sleep a little. Indeed, I persuaded her to take a few drops of an opiate, and Cotton being dressed by that time, I was satisfied that she would be well looked after.

CHAPTER XV.

Roger's breakfast was ready at half-past seven; he had been out almost before daybreak. I don't think he had slept well. I told him how I had been sent for by Mrs. Weir; and he seemed glad upon the whole, to think that she knew the worst. And yet upon talking to him, I found that it was not the worst. Now that the truth had reached Dene, Roger felt himself more at liberty to speak out; and I

learned from him, that Mr. Weir was not only ruined, but that he had gone away with a stain upon his character. Strangely enough, that very business which he had made use of to crush young Mr. Henderson, had been the cause of his temptation and his fall. It had never been a very profitable affair; but it gave him an opening for speculation, and therefore he liked it. Lately he had taken a more active part in the business. Large accounts passed through his hands, and now the whole concern had fallen to pieces; and the accounts having been examined, Mr. Weir was accused of fraud in the management. He was not at hand to answer the charge—he had gone off, no one knew where. It was generally supposed he had left England.

A most dismal story it was, with scarcely a ray of hope or comfort, except that Roger believed a portion of Mrs. Weir's money to have been so settled upon her that it could not well be touched. The Dene estate was heavily mortgaged; yet if it were sold, it was hoped that sufficient would be left to give her and Miss Milicent enough to live upon; and it had been suggested that perhaps also her niece, Mrs. Temple, might come forward to assist, as she had received much kindness from Mrs. Weir's family.

"But it will be a hard struggle, Ursie!" added Roger, when he had given me all these details. "Mrs. Weir has been so little accustomed to rough it; and I am afraid Miss Milicent has no notion how to make both ends meet, and will burn a ton of coals to save a rushlight."

"Penny wise and pound foolish;" I said. "Yes, that will be very like her. I hope they won't go far away from here."

"That you may be able to look after them;" he said quickly. I made no answer.

"They may take a cottage at Compton," continued Roger, a little maliciously; "that wouldn't be far from Sandcombe."

"I am not going to stay at Sandcombe!" I exclaimed, with some anger. "I had rather live on a crust of bread in a garret, than be forced to be all day with Leah."

"We will wait and see how things turn out, Trot," replied Roger quietly. "It does not do to make rash vows,

nor to set ourselves against what God may appoint." He left the breakfast table, and went to the door.

"You must not go away so, Roger!" I exclaimed, following him, "I can't bear it. Something must be settled, one way or the other."

"When?" he asked.

"Now,—at once. How can I go about my work all day, not knowing what is going to happen to me, or where I may be to-morrow."

"I thought that was what we were obliged to do always," he replied. "The settling which you wish for, Ursie, can't be made in a minute. We must see what is going to be done here, and then I must find out a good deal more about Canada; and when I have done that, I must look into William's affairs, and see if I can have the money conveniently. Can't you put it into God's Hands, my little Trot, and trust it?"

His voice and manner brought back the feeling of reverence and submission with which I had been accustomed to listen to him from a child. I said it was very difficult, but I would try. I only begged him to let me know the very moment that anything certain was decided upon.

"My first claim always," he said, laying his broad hand on my head. "You shall hear soon enough."

"And you won't set yourself against common sense, and make up your mind in a hurry that I am not to go?" I said.

"Just the contrary, Trot. I was going to walk over to Compton this morning, to look at Hobson's cottage for William, and I thought I would call in at the parsonage, and have a talk with Mr. Richardson about it all."

"You will meet him," I said; "he will be coming here to see Mrs. Weir."

"So much the better; I shan't have to go out of my way. Hobson's cottage is a good way off from the parsonage."

"Here is the boy coming back from Compton with a message from Mr. Richardson!" I said. "We had better wait and hear what it is."

Roger went across to the house, and I began putting away the breakfast things. I could not bear, that morning, to stand still and think, even for a moment.

Roger came back again very soon. "Mrs. Richardson sends the answer," he said. "Her husband has to be at Longside at ten o'clock, and after that he will come on and see Mrs. Weir. In that case, Ursie, I had better go to Longside directly, or I shall miss him; for I can't wait for him here. William made an appointment with me at Hobson's."

"And you might take me with you," I replied; "I have some business with Mary Kemp, which I was going to do this afternoon. We are to have cold meat for dinner, so it won't signify when I go; and Cook, at the house, will boil us some potatoes."

"Make haste, then, child. I have been wasting more time here now than I ought. But I shall like to have you with me," was added, kindly.

I put my bonnet on directly, and went over to ask Cook about the potatoes, and I thought too that I would inquire about Mrs. Weir. Not that I meant to stay at home because of her, unless there was some very special reason. Though Leah said I was treated as if I was a servant of the family, I had always taken care to show my own independence. Mrs. Weir herself had taught me that. She said to me one day, when, by some accident, I had let out a little of what I felt about Jessie Lee, and the way Leah went on with her, "Ursula, our right will always be given us sooner or later, if we choose to claim it in a proper manner, and if we do not, we have no reason to quarrel with others for that which is our own fault." I think she had learned this from experience. If she had stood out more against her daughter's tyrannising ways, Miss Milicent would never have got the upper hand as she had done. Things being as they were, Mrs. Weir felt she had no right to complain. At any rate, I had profited by the lesson, and had never given in to Miss Milicent, nor even to Mrs. Weir, as I might have done otherwise. Having so many little fanciful ways, Mrs. Weir might have taken up a great deal of my time if I had. We were all the better friends for my independence; I suspect there is no foundation for friendship between persons of any rank, unless there is a feeling of respect which prevents either party from taking liberties, or being encroaching.

As it happened, my going or staying just then was a matter of no consequence, for Mrs. Weir had fallen asleep, and Cotton was with her; so I left a message to tell her when I thought I should be back, and then Roger and I set off for Longside.

It was about three quarters of a mile from Dene, by a tolerably direct road,—Sandy Lane as we called it,—which began just after we passed the gate opening from the wide pasture land immediately about Dene. That piece of land which was neither field nor down, but only a kind of hilly common on which cattle or sheep might feed, was one thing which made Dene different from other places. It was like the sea separating it from the rest of the world. The road through it was private, and no one but ourselves seemed to have any business with Sandy Lane; whilst, standing upon such high ground, we looked out, as it were, upon the world.

Roger was not very talkative that morning; he walked on so fast that I could scarcely follow him; at length he said abruptly, "Have you thought at all, Ursie, of what you will do in case we should make up our minds that it is right to separate?"

"No," I said, "I won't think. I can't make up my mind, whatever others may."

"It would be better," he said, "and kinder to consider; and if you are so vehement against the notion, ten to one but it will come to pass. John Hervey thinks you might be better staying with Mrs. Weir, even if she could only afford to keep you, than you would be at Sandcombe."

"I should be better living on the common by myself than I should be at Sandcombe," I replied; "Leah and I could never help coming to a quarrel, and she does not want me. There is Jessie always to be had."

"If you were there you might be a help and a friend to Jessie," he said.

"Not I, Roger," and I stopped short, and spoke almost angrily; "Jane Shaw is in the way. What am I against her?"

"If the Shaws were only over the sea!" he exclaimed, vehemently. "They are a curse to the country."

The speech was so different from his usual gentle way of judging people that I looked at him in surprise. "You don't know the mischief they are up to, Ursie," he continued, "Pity forbid you should. John Shaw is a scamp, and Jane—"

"Is what?" I asked.

"A lady, according to her own notions," he answered, laughing; but there was something bitter and mocking in his tone.

"That is she, I do believe," was my exclamation, as I looked down the lane, and saw two people coming towards us.

"You are as blind as a beetle, Trot. It is John Hervey and Mary Kemp. I dare say they were going up to Dene to see if they could do any good there. John Hervey is set upon helping Mrs. Weir in some way. He has wonderful thought for such a light-hearted fellow as he is."

"Yes, he is very good-natured," I said, and I watched him and Mary with a kindly feeling as they came towards us, and thought what a pleasant couple they would make; though Mary was not what many men would have taken to. She was plain, and had a frightened, shy, stammering way with her, which it was difficult to get over.

"Well met," exclaimed John, when we were within hearing of each other. "Mary and I were on our way to you. Ursie, how did you get home last night? Roger and you didn't lose your way upon the down, I hope."

"We were not late, and there was a moon," I said, shortly. I could not quite bear any allusion to last evening. John must have seen my face alter, for his manner changed directly. "We may spare ourselves the trouble of our walk, Mary," he said, "if Roger and Ursie are come to tell us all we want to know."

"I was going to inquire for Mrs. Weir," observed Mary, timidly.

"And Ursie will tell us about her, no doubt," said John, and he turned to walk back. "Were you going to Longside?"

"Yes," said Roger, "to see Mr. Richardson, if he is there."

"You will find him in full parley with the Farmer. They have brought over Mr. Stewart, of Hatton, between them, and we have been planning cottages for the last hour. If Dene is to be sold I wish Mr. Stewart may buy it."

"Jane Shaw says that Captain Price, the young man who was here some time ago with Mr. Weir, has his eye upon it," said Mary, in a tone so low that she could scarcely be heard.

"What can Jane Shaw know about the matter?" I asked quickly. "Captain Price is not likely to have told her."

"Jane Shaw is going to be married to Captain Price," said Mary.

"What, Mary? what?" John Hervey actually caught hold of her arm; and Roger said more respectfully, "It must be Hove talk, it can't be true."

"I don't know; I am told that Jane says it," said Mary. She seemed afraid to assert the fact more strongly, even upon such authority, when the others doubted.

"I don't see why it shouldn't be," I said quickly; "they are much of a piece. Captain Price, as far as I ever saw anything of him, is not any better for a gentleman than Jane Shaw is for a farmer's daughter. I don't see why they shouldn't make up together."

"Ursie, you are sharp," observed Roger.

John Hervey supported me. "Ursie is right," he said, "in one way; they are neither of them good in their station, and so they might just as well be out of it. Captain Price has little of a gentleman belonging to him, except it may be his birth; and as for Jane, it is difficult to say what she is; certainly nothing that is a credit to any one who has to do with her."

"Jane thinks that to marry a gentleman will make her a lady," said Mary.

"Let her try!" exclaimed Mr. Hervey, laughing. Then a moment afterwards he added, "What provokes me is, that people can't see their own respectability, since they think so much about it. Where is there a man in all the country more respected than your father, Mary?—and I may say your father's daughter, too;" he added, looking at her and

smiling. "Where is there a family that has more influence? And yet where is there a truer, honester, sturdier old English farmer than Farmer Kemp?"

Mary looked thoroughly pleased, and said she did think her father was respected.

"Isn't he!" said Roger heartily. "If you were just to hear what I hear said of him everywhere,—amongst high and low, rich and poor,—you would feel it an honour to bear his name."

"Perhaps I do feel it so;" said Mary. She smiled rather archly, and I thought she looked quite pretty.

I had it on my lips to say that it was more than any of old Mr. Shaw's daughters could feel for him, but something stopped me. No doubt I was inclined to be sharp, and Roger often gave me a hint to keep a watch over my tongue.

"There is the old Farmer, out in the field by the hay-rick!" exclaimed Mr. Hervey, pointing to a rick in a field at some little distance; "and I think,—yes, Roger,—that is Mr. Richardson with him. If you want to catch him, you had better be off, or you will miss him."

Roger took the hint. I think his heart was full, and he longed to have all his troubles out with Mr. Richardson. He strode forward like a giant, and was over the gate and across the field before we had reached the house.

CHAPTER XVI.

Longside was much larger than Sandcombe,—not so much of a farm in appearance,—for the house was high and square, and stood in a garden, and the farm-buildings and the yard were at one side. The Shaws had lived there before they went to White Hill, and old Mr. Shaw had tried to make it look as much like a regular country-house as he could; and a good deal of money, I believe, had been spent by him and the landlord in refacing it, and laying out the garden. Farmer Kemp took it as it was, and let everything stay, though it could not have been much to his taste. But his notion, as I once heard him say, was, that if a house

did not make a gentleman, neither did it make a farmer. Folks would soon see what he was, and what he wished to be, and though other people had spent money in building up follies, he saw no reason why he was to waste his in helping to pull them down. He was more to be praised for that piece of economy than for many other things which men commended him for. It was a greater sacrifice to him to bear with what looked like being grand and set up, than it would be for most persons to bear with things that are mean.

But Farmer Kemp's wish was always to be, not to seem; his countenance showed that. Every line in it told of truth. And a handsome face it was, too! It struck me that day particularly as we drew near, and he came to meet us with his old-English greeting, putting all his heart into the shake of the hand.

Being in the open air so much had tanned and reddened his complexion, but there was a freshness about it still, though he must have been upwards of sixty. His hair was quite white, and thin, and long, which gave him the look of even an older man than he was; but his blue eyes were as bright as ever,—as full of life and eagerness,—and his mouth, though the smile was singularly good-natured, proved that age had not yet weakened his spirit of determination. Farmer Kemp was no waverer nor doubter. He knew what he meant to do, and he did it; and even when people quarrelled with him they respected him.

"Why, Mary, lass, you are come back soon!" he said, after he had spoken his few kind words of welcome to me. "I thought you were gone up to Dene to be useful."

"Ursie doesn't think there is any way of being useful just now, father," said Mary. "Mrs. Weir has heard everything, and keeps up tolerably."

"You should have gone in though, child; I would have had you see Mrs. Mason. It will be hard times with Mrs. Weir and Miss Milicent," he added, turning to me; "they are away from their own kith and kin, and they are not over friendly with the gentry round, except it be with Mr. Richardson, who has a short purse, and a small house, and a large family. If it came to the point, there might be more real help for Mrs. Weir to be had from Longside than from Compton, only it might not suit her to see it."

"Mrs. Weir is not proud," I said; "at least, I don't think so."

"Poverty is the touchstone of pride, so I have heard say," replied the Farmer; "but come in, Ursie, and tell us more about it. My Goodwoman and I have been talking about you this morning, thinking what an upset there would be for you from all this."

"It is pleasant to know that some persons can take thought for one," I said; and I felt my eyes fill with tears. I don't know what there was in Farmer Kemp's manner which made me always feel what a happiness it would be to have an earthly father.

"So you are sad, child, are you?" he answered. "Cheer up; rain one day, sunshine the next. Come in, and we'll have it all out. Why, there's Roger off with Mr. Richardson! What is that for? and we had not half settled our business."

"Indeed!" observed Mr. Hervey, "it was all but done when Mary and I set off."

"I tell you what, man," said the Farmer, quickly, "it wasn't begun. Give me money in hand, and bricks, and mortar, and I will say something to you; but we have not brought Mr. Stewart to that point yet."

"He promises," said John Hervey.

"Promises! promises!" Farmer Kemp repeated the words slowly. "When you have lived as long as I have, John, you will learn how to value promises, even those of good men; Mr. Stewart, of Hatton, being one,—at least, as goodness is reckoned now. I have been treated with promises for the last fifteen years; and shall I tell you what I think of them? They are uncommonly like the straw a day which the old woman's cow was fed upon till she died."

We all laughed; but John Hervey said he had a better opinion of Mr. Stewart than to think he was not going to keep his word.

"Well! yes,—well! he will keep it in the letter, I grant you. Whilst he has Mr. Richardson to back him, and me knocking at his door, he can't well do otherwise. But he is not a man to go of his own accord against what he considers his interest. If he was, he wouldn't have let things come to

the pass they are. He would never have needed our eyes for spectacles to help him to see that he can't make a poor, ignorant man a Christian by forcing him to live like a heathen. Why, there are cottages on the Hatton estate which aren't two degrees better than my pig-sty; and there is he, with his five thousand a year, crying out about the expense of rebuilding them, and threatening—what do you think now, John, he threatens?" and Farmer Kemp stopped as we were about to enter the house, and drew John Hervey aside.

"We had better go in," said Mary to me, in her quiet voice.

But I was curious, and something better than curious—interested; for I saw the working of John Hervey's face, and I knew that whatever Farmer Kent might be telling him was giving him pain.

I wondered that Mary seemed to care so little for it. She watched them for an instant, and then said, composedly: "Mr. Stewart told father that if Hatton was such an expense to him, he should sell it, and he knew a person willing to buy it. And I can tell who that is," added Mary, with a little more of life in her tone; "it's Captain Price."

"What! he that is to marry Jane Shaw? It can't be," I exclaimed. "Dene and Hatton! He would be the lord of the country."

"Father says it," was Mary's reply.

"And you don't care about it? You aren't worried about it?" I exclaimed. "Mary, you are a wonder."

"It is not come yet, and it mayn't come at all," said Mary. "When it does it will be time enough to fret."

That was very true; but somehow, the words did not quite come home to me just then, and when I looked at John Hervey again, I thought less of Captain Price, and the chance of his buying Hatton, than of what John would do if he took to himself such a quiet wife.

"You will stay now and rest, Ursie," said Mary, opening the door for me. "Mother is in the kitchen, most likely, but she will be glad to come into the parlour and see you."

Mary left me in the passage, for I knew how to find my way to the parlour—a pleasant little three-sided room, having cupboards all round the walls, and a cheerful-looking corner

fireplace. When Longside was built, it was intended for a housekeeper's room.

Mary had much more taste than William's wife, and though the room was not by any means as large, and not half as well furnished, as the great parlour at Sandcombe, it was much more comfortable. There were flower-pots in the window-seat, and flowers on the table, and over the mantelpiece; and Mary was not, like Leah, ashamed of homely work, and so it was lying about ready to be taken up; whilst some books near it showed that there was leisure at Longside for something besides mere drudgery. One of the books was a Bible: I think Mrs. Kemp, and Mary, and her two little sisters, generally read together the lesson for the day in the New Testament, some time in the course of the morning.

Mrs. Kemp came in almost immediately. In her way she was as clever and shrewd as her husband, and quite as good; and as for her kind-heartedness, there was no end to it. The Goodwoman, as Farmer Kemp always called her, was never known to forget a friendly word or a friendly thought for any one. She was always especially considerate for me. I suspect she felt for me because I was an orphan, for she had known herself what it was to be brought up without father or mother. Perhaps it might have been that which made her so careful about the young girls who came to her as servants, or had anything to do with the farm-work. I have often known people object to take girls who have been at farm-service, thinking they might have learned evil there, but it was never so with Mrs. Kemp's girls; she made herself their friend, and kept them out of temptation, as she would her own daughters, until it began to be considered quite a recommendation in the neighbourhood to have worked at Longside.

"Early, Ursie, but always welcome," was Mrs. Kemp's greeting, as she smoothed down her white apron, and pulled down and fastened the sleeves of her dress, which she had turned up, I suppose, whilst assisting in the kitchen. What a round, bright-coloured, good-humoured face hers was! quite pretty still, and almost young. I could not help kissing her, though kissing was not very much in my way with most people.

"Farmer and I spent a good half-hour, this morning, talking about you and things at Dene," continued Mrs. Kemp, drawing her chair close to mine. "I should have been up myself, only I thought it might be taken for a liberty, as I don't go there often; so I sent Mary, making sure she would see Mrs. Mason, if she could get a glimpse of you. What can we do for you now?"

"Nothing," I said; "nothing now, at least. Roger is gone to talk to Mr. Richardson about it all."

My face must have shown my feelings,—though, the moment before, I had made a strong resolution against betraying them.

"Ah! poor child; yes.—Dear heart! don't take on so. Roger can't go to a better friend. So it is all up with you, is it; and you must leave Dene? I thought as much, poor child—poor child!"

"I don't know; I can't say what we must do," I exclaimed; and the sorrow rose up in my heart, like a great wave about to rush in upon the shore. But it broke inwards, and I was thankful for it.

"He will find another place; you will have a home again very soon," continued Mrs. Kemp. "Such a trusty, worthy young man as he is, and knowing so much about everything! Not that it will be like Dene, where you have lived so long."

"I shan't care for anything," I said, "as long as Roger and I are together." I could not allude more clearly to the Canada project without knowing whether Roger would like it.

But the world always knows more of one's affairs than one suspects; and Mrs. Kemp jumped to my meaning in an instant.

"Ah! then it's true!" she exclaimed; "and he's bent upon going off by himself. But he mustn't do it, Ursie; he must think of you."

"He does think of me," I answered, quietly. "It is that which keeps him back now. He is gone to talk it over with Mr. Richardson."

"And he will take out a wife with him, I suppose," continued Mrs. Kemp, thoughtfully; "or he will find one there for the asking. Well! young men must settle themselves."

My heart sank. Mrs. Kemp, with all her sympathy, was like the rest of the world; she could not enter into griefs out of her own line. A happy wife herself, she was unable to comprehend that any pang could be caused by the prospect of seeing others happy also.

I faced the subject boldly, and, in a proud tone, I said, "If Roger wants to marry, and go to Canada, he may depend upon it I shall never be the one to stand in his way."

"You might go with him, whether he is married or not," said Mary.

Mrs. Kemp interposed. "No, Ursie; don't be tempted in that way. When people marry, they are best left to themselves; especially at the beginning. After they have gone on some time, and become used to each other's ways, and learnt all there is to learn, a sister, or an aunt, may fit in well enough, particularly when there are children, and relations can make themselves useful. But at first setting off, depend upon it it's best to give young married folks a push into the world, turn them round three times, and leave them to shift for themselves. Having no one else to turn to, they are forced then to keep close to each other."

"As if they wouldn't do it naturally," said Mary, with a shy laugh.

"That is as may be," replied Mrs. Kemp, laughing herself; "I am not going to let you girls into those secrets. Only one thing I will say to you, that if you do get a good husband, you will love him better at the end of twenty years than at the beginning, let his faults be what they may."

Mary was silent. I felt that she was probably thinking of John Hervey, and something like a pang of envy crossed me; for I was sure of him, at least, that, know him ever so long, one should only learn to honour him the more.

The conversation wandered to different subjects after this. Mrs. Kemp made me tell her everything I could about Mrs. Weir,—everything, that is, which could be told without betraying secrets. I found that the state of Mr. Weir's affairs had been suspected—almost known for certain, indeed—in the neighbourhood many weeks before; and it had been no matter of surprise to any one but myself, that Mrs. Weir and Miss Milicent should come to Dene without him.

Many stories were afloat,—most of them of a disagreeable kind,—and such as made it doubtful whether he could ever show his face in England again; but that which Mrs. Kemp, and the farmer also (for he came in and joined in the conversation), took most to heart was, the prospect of the Dene estate falling into the hands of Captain Price.

Whilst poor Mrs. Weir lay on her bed, unable to take any thought for her affairs, the world had arranged them for her, and in a very likely, sensible way, according to its own ideas. Captain Price had a good deal of ready money, and he was going to marry Jane Shaw; and Jane lived near Dene, and Dene must be sold, or else Mrs. Weir would have nothing to live upon. These facts were undeniable; so the kind world put them all together, and settled the business comfortably; and most of our acquaintances looked at Jane Shaw, and thought she was luckier than one girl in a thousand; and Farmer Kemp and his wife looked at Dene, and the tenants and labourers, and sighed.

I sighed too, when I heard Farmer Kemp talk that morning. He was a man who could not rid himself of an idea when once he was possessed of it, and who could scarcely help forcing it, perhaps, now and then, a little at the wrong time, upon other people. But being so earnest, he caught those who otherwise might not have listened; and this morning, though I came to Dene full of my own fears and Mrs. Weir's sorrows, I still was carried away by what he said, so as for a time to be interested by it.

Of course people who have a hobby of any kind, try to make you believe that the one thing upon which they have set their hearts is the remedy for all evils. Farmer Kemp was so bent upon his scheme for improving the labourers' cottages, that, to hear him talk, one might have fancied that if poor people had sufficient space for their families to live decently, there would be no evil left in the world.

But putting aside that which I suppose is the weak point with us all, he certainly did open my eyes to several things which I had never thought of before. He made me see how persons, brought up respectably, may sink into actual vice from the want of a comfortable home; how the wife leaves her neat habits, and becomes slovenly, because she finds it

useless to try and be tidy, when the wet comes in at the roof, and the floor is damp, and the windows are broken, and she cannot get them mended, and the children are sickly from cold and draughts, and huddled together in one room, and perhaps three or four in one bed. And he showed me also, how the husband leaves his fire-side, because he finds no comfort there, and goes to the ale-house, and so takes the first step on the road which is to lead him and his family to ruin of body and soul;—and how the boys, as they grow up, are driven away from home by the dirt, and quarrelling, and confusion, and lounge about in the lanes with idle companions, and are at length led into great sin;—and how the daughters grow bold and forward, from being forced to live, as it were, in public, and so lose the sense of all which makes a woman modest and respectable, and become a disgrace and burden to their families. All this, and much more, Farmer Kemp put before me,—and I listened, for I could not help it, though my thoughts wandered off at times to Roger and Mr. Richardson, and the conversation on which all my plans in life were to depend. The subjects were not so very far apart as they seemed. If I did not go to Canada with Roger, I might have to live at Sandcombe with William and Leah; and there were more cases than Kitty Hobson's which I felt sure would trouble me if I was with them. I knew that William had a good many cottages in his own hands, and that the general opinion was that he was a hard man to his labourers. After talking to Farmer Kemp, it seemed more impossible than ever to be happy with him and Leah.

I dined at Longside. Mrs. Kemp would not let me go, and I waited, expecting Roger every minute, but he did not come; and I made up my mind, at last, that he had gone home over the hill, instead of coming back for me. As it was by that time nearly half-past twelve, and Mrs. Kemp pressed me much to stay, it seemed better that I should. Roger, I knew, would eat his cold meat alone, without troubling himself about me, and I must confess that it was a great relief to me to be with people of my own class, who could understand and feel for me.

It was a different kind of comfort from that which I often felt in conversing with Mrs. Weir. It gave me a feeling of

breathing fresh air, but it did not raise me up as talking to Mrs. Weir did. Mrs. Kemp showed me how to make use of this world, Mrs. Weir how to despise it. Both were good in their way; but Mrs. Kemp's lesson was the first and easiest, and it strikes me that it is the one first taught us by God.

We had a little conversation about Kitty Hobson after dinner, and I was glad to find that Mrs. Kemp meant to give her a trial, though Leah had cast her off.

It had been upon my mind that something should be done for the girl, knowing that Leah had taken no pains with her, and turned her off without proper warning, but I had been too much occupied with my own troubles to form any plan for her. Mrs. Richardson, it appeared, considered her not by any means hopeless, and had persuaded Mrs. Kemp to take her, and put her under a steady dairymaid, who would see that she did her work, and keep her out of harm's way. I think having so few poor people near me to care for, had made me more particular about those whom I did at all know. I never could rest till I had done for them all that seemed to lie in my power, though that was little enough. But, as Mrs. Kemp said, "If you can only stop the stone before it begins to roll down, you may keep it safe; when once it has set off, there is no checking it." Kitty Hobson might be on the brink of everything that was bad, but it was as yet only on the brink. So I was pleased to hear that she was to be at Longside, and I told Mrs. Kemp that, if she went on well, I thought I had a stuff gown I could give her as an encouragement.

I felt better and brighter after having settled this little matter—more able to look trouble in the face. Helping others always gives one a feeling of strength; at least, I have found it so.

I shrank less from the mention of Canada when Farmer Kemp and John Hervey spoke to me about it before I went away. They were very kind and straightforward, as was their fashion, but both of them agreed in advising me to stay at home. I was sure that John was sorry when he said it, he looked at me so sorrowfully; and when, at length, I said good-bye to them all, and set off on my way back to Dene, he

walked part of the way with me, and I was able to open my heart to him, more even than to Mrs. Kemp, because there were subjects connected with Dene which he knew more about than any one else.

He was such a bright, hopeful person, that merely talking to him did me good. And he had a kind way of turning his mind to the things that interested one, which led one on in spite of oneself. And then he understood Roger so well, so much better than other people. He knew all that lay hid under that rough, silent manner of his. When I said that Roger's heart would break if he was left to bear trouble by himself, he did not laugh as some might have done, he only said earnestly, though cheerfully, "It won't do, Ursie, to take more care upon yourself than God intends for you. You may try to keep Roger's heart from breaking; and whilst you are doing that, you may all the time be breaking some other person's. What is to hinder you from running away from him some day, and setting up a home of your own?"

"I have a home," I answered, eagerly. "Roger's home is my home, and it will be mine always." I believe I said it all the more eagerly, because something of misgiving lay at the bottom of my heart.

John Hervey laughed as he answered, "You may change your note some day, Ursie; and, anyhow, it is not wise to look to that only, for you know there are two wills to the bargain you and Roger seem to have made; and if, after all, he keeps to it, he has but to send for you, and you can go to him."

John had a dreadful quantity of common sense. I don't think when he was a boy he could ever have cared for the kind of reading which had always been such happiness to me. He never indulged in notions of what he would do if he was in other circumstances. I am sure he would have thought me wild if I had told him one quarter of the fancies and wishes which had haunted me as long as I could remember. It was just the present duty with him, and nothing beyond but trust. I think that gave him his singular look of happiness; he was never perplexed what to do, because he did what came, and left the consequences. Sometimes, when I

have looked upon the light, rippling and dancing on the waves below St. Anne's Hill, I have thought that it was just like John's sunny mind, making a clear, bright path wherever it moved.

CHAPTER XVII.

When I reached home, I found Mrs. Weir awake, and inquiring for me. Seeing Mr. Richardson had been a great comfort to her; but she was still in a maze, not able to keep any one plan or idea in her head for ten minutes together, except it might be the duty of joining her husband. Mr. Richardson had promised to write and make inquiry about him for her, and this was the point to which she turned continually. As to taking any steps for removing from Dene at present, it seemed to her an utter impossibility. Servants, and carriages, and horses, must all be kept; no one could tell why, except that it must be found out first where Mr. Weir was.

I am afraid, poor lady! she tried me a little. I was young, with a clear head, and strong nerves, and a good constitution, and I found it very difficult to enter into such an anxious, undecided mind, burdened and shattered as it was by long sorrow; and I was selfish, too, for I was very unhappy, and never could endure suspense, and I felt, though I did not choose to own it to myself, that my plans might possibly be determined by those of Mrs. Weir. It was so strange to me to see her sitting in her drawing-room, with all her little comforts and pretty things about her, and working just as usual, not seeming to know how many important things were to be discussed and arranged. I could almost have thought she did not fully know what had happened, only that her eyes were so weak and red; and every now and then she would lay down her work and fold her hands together, and I saw her lips move, and knew that the grief was so keen that it could only be soothed by prayer.

Active and sharp-sighted as people called me, I had a great deal to learn from Mrs. Weir.

I spent but a few minutes with her, for it had been an idle day with me, and I had a great deal to do at the cottage; yet, as I left the house, a sudden impulse seized me to run up, just for two minutes, to the seat upon the bank, and breathe the fresh air from the down. I went by the back of the house, instead of by the garden, for I wished to avoid being seen; but I was not able to escape Miss Milicent's watchful eye, and I had scarcely reached the little gate opening from the road into the shrubbery before she joined me.

"What are you doing here, Ursie Grant? I thought I should find you at home. You have not been at home all day."

"No, Miss Milicent," I said; "I had business away." I am afraid I had always some pleasure in baffling her.

"I have been wanting you; I have a great many things to say to you. Are you going in now?"

I replied, that I should be in a few minutes, and, turning aside from the shrubbery, I walked some paces on, as though I wished to go out upon the down.

"If you are going to walk, I will come with you," pursued Miss Milicent.

"I would not give you that trouble," I replied; for I saw there was no chance of being rid of her. "If you please, I will go back with you to the house."

"But you had business up here," she said, scanning my face carefully. "You were looking for some one, or waiting for some one."

"I was going to sit by myself, and think a little," I said, quietly. Such a strange, doubting look she gave me! And then she said, as though she was determined to test me, "If it is your brother you are watching for, Ursie Grant, you will most likely find him at home. He came back from Compton, under the down, by the gamekeeper's cottage."

"I was not watching for any one, Miss Milicent," was my answer; "it was as I said; I was going to sit by myself."

I am afraid that was rather a rude speech; but she aggravated me uncommonly, and I had not enough religion at that time to enable me to keep my passionate temper under proper control.

"It won't hurt you to go back and talk over some matters with me," said Miss Milicent, decidedly; "and if Roger Grant is in, he can come and talk too."

"Roger is very busy, Miss Milicent," I replied: "if there is anything particular to be said, you had best, please, tell it to me, and I will repeat it to him."

She stood still for a moment, putting her hand in the pocket of her black jacket. A change came over her face,—I noticed it though she turned aside,—a flush was upon her cheek, and a mist seemed to rest upon her eyes. They were not fierce eyes then; there was a world of feeling in them, struggling, as it seemed, to have vent. But she kept an iron rule over herself, as she did over others, and, whatever there might have been working within, she prevented it from coming forth in her voice, as she laid her strong hand on my shoulder, and said, "You will be leaving Dene soon, Ursie Grant; we shall not have need of you nor of Roger."

My spirit was up then, I confess, and I said, "We are ready to go, Miss Milicent; Roger has other work looked out for him, and I came here only for him."

Others might well have been angry at my manner, but I doubt if Miss Milicent even remarked it. She went on, in her own way, "You will be finding other friends, and you are a stirring woman, Ursie, so you won't have much time to think about Dene."

"I shall think about it, Miss Milicent," I answered. "I have been very happy here, and Mrs. Weir has been very kind."

"And I have been very cross," she said, bluntly; and then she stopped. "But it is no use to talk of that. If I was cross without cause, I am very sorry now; and if I had cause, I will try to be sorry when I can think it over."

I believe I smiled; it was such a very odd way of being penitent. She went on, "I didn't come to you to talk about that so much, but I would just ask the question at once,—are you thinking of going with Roger wherever he goes?"

"I can't say," was my reply; "it is all uncertain."

"But you must make up your mind before long; and what will you do till it is settled?"

"I have not thought about it, Miss Milicent. I can't settle things in such a hurry."

"Then it is a pity you didn't live before the Deluge," she replied. "Life isn't long enough for people who think so much before they know which foot to put foremost. I have settled all my matters, and my mother's too, since breakfast."

"They may be easier than mine," I said, "and you have no one but yourself and Mrs. Weir to consult."

What a foolish speech it was! It must have seemed as though I alluded to Mr. Weir's absence; but I don't know how it is, I often find that if there is anything I ought not to say, I am sure to say it.

Miss Milicent stamped her foot upon the ground and bit her lip, but the next moment she was looking me full in the face; and speaking almost angrily, she said, "If you haven't any other place to stay at, Ursie Grant, there is a home for you at Dene whilst we are here, which won't be many weeks; and when we go to Compton, which Mr. Richardson and I think is best, you can come too, and I think you may be some good to my mother, if you will." The last words escaped as though against her inclination.

"Thank you, Miss Milicent," I replied. But I couldn't say more, for I scarcely understood what she meant.

She twisted a large gold ring, which she wore on her middle finger, round and round, as she always did when she was put out. Neither of us said more for some seconds.

"'Thank you,' means you won't stay," said Miss Milicent at last.

"It means I must do whatever duty comes before me," I replied.

"Well! but if it is a duty to help my mother? It may be."

"I would help Mrs. Weir willingly, if I could," I replied; "but she is not my first claim."

"She is no claim at all," exclaimed Miss Milicent; and her face became crimson, and then all colour left it, and it grew, not pale, but a kind of blueish yellow. She sat down upon the bench.

"You aren't well, Miss Milicent," I said, drawing near.

She motioned me from her, turned away her head, and almost to my terror I heard, as she buried her face in her hands, something like a groan.

My thought was to go away. She was one who would never forget having been seen to be weak and foolish. But I need not have been afraid. She rose up again quite calm, and said, more gently, "It is not my mother's wish, nor mine, Ursie, to interfere with any claims; but there is much to be done, and a good head wanted, and my mother has been used to trust to you; and it seemed that, just for a while, till you had another house over your head, you might have been willing to stay on, and see how things are going; and so I said it;—but if you have other claims, don't think of it. We shall do; we shall get on quite well. Don't think of it;" and she waved her hand, as I was about to speak, and moved towards the shrubbery gate.

How proud she was!—but how proud I was, too! My conscience gave me such a pang, I couldn't bear it. I caught hold of her dress, and said, "Stay, Miss Milicent; don't let us part this way. I have claims, but not just now. I could stay, if it were any good; for Mrs. Weir——" and the thought of her sorrow came over me, and my voice trembled.

"You would be cared for," she said, not letting herself be moved.

"Yes; Mrs. Weir cares for every one," I said.

"And you would have board, and lodging, and——"

"It is all I want," I exclaimed, hastily.

"And Fanny is to stay, to cook, and do the work; and you would have Mrs. Mason's rooms for the time," continued Miss Milicent.

"Yes, yes, indeed; I know it would be all very comfortable."

"And you could go on with your work. Nobody would ask anything of you,—only if now and then you had a fancy to look in upon my mother;—but we wouldn't interfere. We would have you think of your own claims. And if we move to Compton, there would be only a very small room; it mightn't be comfortable. We had rather you should go just your own way."

But as Miss Milicent spoke, I saw by her restless eye that her whole heart was set upon the plan.

I felt it best to cut the matter short. I don't think I was gracious; though I wished to be. "It's best to take one

step at a time in such matters, Miss Milicent," I said. "We won't settle anything about Compton now. There is no knowing what may happen. Roger may be off to a new home, and wish me to go with him; so it would not do to make an engagement. But as for staying, I will do my utmost for the time being to help set matters right here, and work for Mrs. Weir in any way she wishes it; and food and lodging will be quite an equivalent."

Her face changed. "That is as you think, not as I think," she said; and she held out her hand to me.

I took hold of it. Her large, strong fingers held mine quite in a gripe. We gave each other a hearty shake. "You will do my mother good, Ursie Grant," she said.

"Then I shall do myself good, and make myself happy," I said, earnestly; "for there is no one I would serve sooner than Mrs. Weir." And so we parted.

I had settled upon the next step. I did not repent it, even when I thought the matter over quietly by myself. After all, there was a good deal of self-pleasing in that notion of mine, that I could never be away from Roger. Whatever the end of it all might be, he would manage very well without me for a time. William would give him a home at Sandcombe, and Leah was less likely to complain if she had only one of us quartered upon her. And I had decided, without arguing backwards and forwards, and consulting my own wishes. I had determined to do just the thing put before me as a duty, and not to think of consequences; and I was beginning to learn—what I have since been taught thoroughly by long experience—that when a person is in a puzzle, being come to a point in life where many roads meet, and there is no sign-post, there is no greater mistake than to try and direct yourself by your reason. It won't help you at all; for ten to one but it is biassed by inclination. Neither are friends very likely to help; for they can, for the most, only decide according to what you tell them. The first little sign of duty that comes, if it is only in the way of setting your house to rights, or casting up your accounts, is the sign-post set up by God's Providence; and when that is done, He will be sure to open the way wider, if you have only patience to wait. But we are all apt to overlook the little duty, and think we will attend

to it when we have settled the great one; and so we set out on the wrong road, perhaps never to regain the right one. I might have argued with myself for hours whether it was best to stay at Dene or go wherever Roger went, and not have come to a conclusion; or, if I had, I should not have been satisfied that I had decided rightly. But Miss Milicent's offer, and the knowledge that I might help Mrs. Weir, seemed to me to be God's sign-post, and I was thankful that I had made up my mind to follow it.

I bustled about all the afternoon, trying to prevent myself from over-thinking; but there was no heart in what I did, for was not everything to be upset and undone before long? About five o'clock I laid out the tea-things, expecting Roger to come in, and I took a pleasure, though it made my heart ache all the while, in putting some stocks, and sweet-briar, and a rose or two in a flower-jar which Jessie Lee had given me about a fortnight before. I thought whether such flowers grew in Canada, and it seemed as though I could scarcely live without something bright and sunshiny; but I turned away from the subject, and ran across to the house for a minute, to ask for Mrs. Weir, and see if there was anything I could do for her. Mrs. Mason was making her a cup of coffee; so I took it up, and we had a few minutes' conversation,—not about anything particular, but there was something in her way of speaking which made me feel how glad she was to have me about her, and I went back comforted.

Roger was coming down the hill on horseback as I left the house; the horse was quite hot, so I knew he had been riding fast, not to be late for tea. He called out to me directly, to say he was sorry he had kept me waiting; and then he jumped off, and led his horse away to the stable. I did not go after him, for I was ashamed of my impatience; and besides, Roger never liked to be made to tell things before his own time,—very few men do. Presently he came in, looking very warm, and pushing his hair off his forehead. He sat down just for a moment, and then he jumped up, and said he should go into the back kitchen and wash his hands; he was not fit to sit down to tea. I let him go, but it seemed a terribly long time before he came back. He drew a chair

to the table, and began cutting some bread. I gave him his cup of tea, but it didn't please him, and he took up the milk-jug, and poured out an ocean of milk, only slowly, almost drop by drop, looking at it intently all the while.

I could bear it no longer. "Well!" I said.

"Well! Trot."

He smiled so pleasantly, I could almost have believed it was a dream that trouble was at hand.

"Come out to Canada to see me this time next year, Trot?"

"Then it's settled," I said.

"Yes, settled."

I must have cut my piece of bread into twenty bits before I tried to speak again. Roger laid down his knife, and stretched his hand across the table.

"Shake hands, little woman; we will have merry days yet, please God."

"Merry days for you, perhaps," I exclaimed, bitterly. "You are a man, and you like change."

"I like doing what comes to me as right," he said, gravely; "and so do you, Trot, when you let yourself think. I have talked it all over with Mr. Richardson. He has known other men go out, and do well; and he thinks I have a better chance than most. I have a fair sum to begin with, and it will go farther there than here."

"And so you are all for making money," I said. "That was never your line before, Roger."

He was very patient with me. He saw that sorrow made me perverse.

"Well! yes," he said, and he laughed; "I am all for making money,—not for money's sake, but for money's worth,—that I may be of use in the world, and do a few things I have a fancy for. When your wedding-day comes, Ursie, you shall have no cause to complain, because your brother Roger set out in life with a wish to make money."

That was too much for me. I jumped up and kissed him, and then I rushed away to the window.

When I came back, we were able to discuss matters quietly. He told me that Mr. Richardson had entered into the business very kindly, and had given him a good deal of information, having some relations in Canada. He had lent

him a book, too, which would help him in some ways; but the thing he most advised was that Roger should go up to London, to consult with a person whom Mr. Richardson knew, who had been himself in Canada, and had made money there. What was even more to the point, Mr. Richardson had advised Roger not to be too shy of asking William for any money he might want. It might cause him a little trouble to raise it, but it was Roger's right, and if he gave up a good prospect of doing well merely from over-scrupulousness, the time would come when both he and William would repent it. This advice had helped Roger a good deal, I could see.

"A second conscience is a great help, Ursie," he observed to me, as he finished what he had to say of his visit. "I had a fear of being hard, and selfish, and pressing my own wishes against William's. But I suppose Mr. Richardson may be right. To be just to oneself may be the first step towards being just to others. Only it is difficult to know where justice ends and selfishness begins."

"It can't be with you, Roger," I said; "you have not a grain of selfishness in you."

"Not so sure of that, Ursie," he said. "Mr. Richardson gave me a hint this afternoon. He told me I was too fond of seeing every one happy about me; and so could not make up my mind to give pain, even when it was needful: and after all, that is only another kind of selfishness."

"That was when you were talking of me," I said.

"Partly of you, partly of William and Leah. They will be sadly put out!"

"And what shall I be?"

He came round me and patted me on the shoulder. "A stout-hearted woman, who will bear whatever comes, and be patient."

"Then Mr. Richardson says I am not to go?"

"Not for a year; you will come then, if all goes well, and I determine to settle there. But Mr. Richardson advises me not to be hasty. He thinks his friend in London might put me in the way of finding some one who would let me join with him in managing and working for a year, and so give me time to look about me. He says, what is very true, that to leave one's country and one's relations in a hurry, may be

a thing to be repented of all one's life. If I do stay, I must send for you: and there are plenty of people coming out continually, who will take care of you on the voyage; and I can easily run down and meet you wherever you land."

I was silent.

"What are you thinking of?" asked Roger.

"Why, that you are a man, Roger, and are turning round to a new life, and liking it; and not knowing in the least what I shall feel the long year when you are gone,—all by myself,—no home."

"Sandcombe," he said;—but his voice was low, almost as though he was ashamed of saying it.

"And you would like Sandcombe, yourself?" I said, reproachfully.

He thought for a moment,—I saw he was annoyed. But the cloud passed over; and he answered with such a kind, honest look,—I never saw the same in any one else,—"No, I should not like it, Trot; and it is much harder for you to stay than for me to go. But there will be an end."

"God grant it!" I said; "but it mayn't be the end we are looking for."

"It will be God's end, any how," he replied.

He walked across the room to a table which stood in the corner, by the dresser;—my mother's Bible always lay upon it; the old Bible out of which he showed me the pictures on a Sunday afternoon, when I was a little girl. He turned to the parting of David and Jonathan; it was a favourite chapter of his. "Look here, Ursie," he said, as he brought the book to me and pointed to the last verses; "other people before us have had to part. Just read me the verses; I like them best in your voice." And I read: "And as soon as the lad was gone, David arose out of a place towards the south, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times: and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded and Jonathan said to David: Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying: The Lord be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever. And he arose and departed; and Jonathan went into the city."

I could not talk any more of business after that; but I went up to my own room and prayed, and had a good cry.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The next two months were a perfect whirl. As fast as anything was settled, it seemed to be unsettled; and every one's plans seemed to interfere with those of another. Day after day, Roger arranged to go to London, and see the Canadian gentleman, Mr. Green, who was Mr. Richardson's friend; but as surely as he had decided to go, so surely something happened to prevent him. And all this time he was working at William to get the money-matter settled; and William was hanging back and raising difficulties. At last, when it seemed the matter would never come to an end, Farmer Kemp offered to let William have the money, if he would give him the same interest and the same security which had satisfied Roger; and then there really was no longer any reasonable excuse. I am sure Farmer Kemp did it out of mere love to Roger; for he and William were not even as much friends as they used to be. The fret about the cottages was always going on; and Leah made matters worse, for she was angry because Mrs. Richardson and Mrs. Kemp had taken up Kitty Hobson. I did not trouble myself much about Kitty, nor about any one just then, except Roger and Mrs. Weir. When I was not thinking of one, I was of the other. Roger approved of my plan of staying at Dene as long as I could, but how long that would be was a very doubtful matter. There was a report that Mr. Weir was in France; and then Mrs. Weir was wild to go to him; but the next day it was contradicted. A week afterwards, some one declared he had been heard of in America, and the week after that it was France again; always something new, and always something uncertain;—and at last Mr. Richardson and Miss Milicent consulted together, and agreed that the only thing to keep Mrs. Weir quiet was to put out of her head entirely the notion of going to her husband. Till that was done there would be no coming to a conclusion about anything else.

Dene, as I think I have said, was Mrs. Weir's own property, settled upon her so that the creditors could not touch it; but it was not a place she could live at, and there was

nothing to be done but to sell it. A good thing it was, so every one said, that there was some one at hand ready to buy it. Captain Price came forward from the first, with a good offer for the house and grounds, not the whole estate, he was by no means rich enough to buy that, for his fortune had been very much overrated. The lawyers talked of trying to obtain more by an auction in London, but Mrs. Weir's trustees would not consent. It would bring additional expenses, and after all they could not expect more than the fair sum which Captain Price was willing to give. The interest of this, and a little money belonging to Miss Milicent, which had been left her by her grandmother, would, it was hoped, enable them to live with tolerable comfort.

Mrs. Weir was as passive as a child all the time the discussions were going on. I think it provoked Miss Milicent. She once said to me that she thought it quite wicked to take everything for granted in that way. How did her mother know she had a penny? she never took the trouble to ask. It was very true that God fed the sparrows, but if the sparrows didn't open their mouths, no food would ever get down their throats.

There was some truth in this, and I thought I would try and rouse Mrs. Weir a little, when I had the opportunity. And that came soon enough; Farmer Kemp's offer was accepted, and Roger was to go up to London early the next week to see Mr. Green; and then Miss Milicent proposed that I should go over to the house and stay there. One reason was because I might not like sleeping at the cottage alone, and another because Mrs. Mason was going away,—a source of greater regret to me I think than to Miss Milicent. I liked Mrs. Mason very much, and never forgot the first evening of my coming to Dene, and how kind she was, and the tea Roger and I had with her. We had been good friends from that day, and I owed a great deal to her, and I hope I was grateful, though I was not what might be called fond of her. She was strict, and had not much warmth at the bottom, though a great deal of kindliness at the top. I did all I could for her by helping to pack her boxes, and trying to understand about the accounts and other things which she had left not quite settled, and on Saturday morn-

ing I said good-bye to her, and she went off in Farmer Kemp's light cart, which was to take her to Hove; from thence I think she was going to London, to be housekeeper in some great family. It was the first departure, and it made the place seem very lonely.

I don't like now to recall the last Sunday with Roger at Dene. Some troubles there are in life which it is rather pleasant to look back upon, one feels so glad to have escaped from them. But there are others which arouse a feeling of pity for oneself, such as one might have for another. I remember having read a story of a lady who cried over her own funeral, and really I could almost cry over my mournfulness on that Sunday. There was the last walk to Compton Church over the down, and the meeting with William and Leah, and the busy gossip of the neighbours, who came up and talked to us after the service, as if it was the commonest thing in the world that was going to happen to us. And then William would make us go back with him to Sandcombe and dine, and kept us so long there that we were late at Church in the afternoon, and I felt that Roger was fretted with himself for giving in. But we had a quiet time afterwards, and a comforting talk as we walked back to Dene, when it was growing cooler, and there was a breeze on the hill just enough to give motion to the light fern-leaves and the crimson foxglove-bells, and to lift up the hot mist which had been hanging all day over the sea, and show the sparkle of the waves in the bay, and beneath the white cliffs.

They are there still,—the ferns and the foxgloves on the green hill, the white cliffs, the broad blue sea,—but they have never looked to me since as they did on that evening.

The peacock screamed as we entered the Dene shrubbery. I should not have remembered it, but that it made me silly, for I burst into tears, and Roger, seeing Miss Milicent in the road, told me to leave him, and turn into the walks in the plantation, under the hill, till I could get right again. I did not go far away, but remained watching him through the trees, and when Miss Milicent was gone, I ran home as quickly as I could.

There was little to be done in the way of preparation for Roger's journey, so we had a nice long evening together,

talking a good deal more of things past than of things to come. We neither of us liked to dwell much upon them; and we were to meet again, we hoped, before long, and then our way would be made clearer. Now we were like children groping about in the dark.

"Yet not quite the dark," was Roger's last speech to me as we took our candles to go to bed. "God always gives us light enough for the next step."

The next day Roger was gone, at least from Dene, and I was going; but whither was the question? I felt it ought to be settled soon, and that very afternoon I set myself to the task of bringing Mrs. Weir to look her affairs full in the face, and see what she was doing, and what others were doing for her, and what she would wish to have done herself. Miss Milicent, I think, had made a mistake in one respect. She had managed everything for her mother so long, that Mrs. Weir was completely out of the habit of managing for herself, and now Miss Milicent was inclined to turn round and reproach her for it.

Poor lady! she looked quite surprised, when I said to her as I carried her cup of coffee into the drawing-room, about five o'clock, "You must have enough to do, Ma'am, to settle your mind when there is so much to be done. I wish I could help you."

"I leave it all," she replied. "It will come right—as right as it can. Do not stand, Ursula. Thank you; please put down the coffee, and there is a seat; the evenings are very long."

"But growing shorter, Ma'am," I said: "a fortnight yesterday past the longest day; and then there will only be six weeks more of what one may call summer."

"I do not look forward, Ursula."

"Only when you are obliged, I suppose, Ma'am. Miss Milicent tells me you think of removing to the new house that is just built at Compton."

"It it were God's will, I would not wish to move anywhere, Ursula, except to my grave. I am only burdensome; I can do no good."

"Not perhaps in the way you would like, Ma'am," I replied. "But if we have life given us, I take it for granted

there is some purpose in it, if it is only to exercise others in patience."

I really did not mean anything particular. I intended only to answer her own words, though, when I had spoken, I saw I might seem rude.

But Mrs. Weir took my remarks so quietly!—in the way which made me often feel that she had only just missed being a saint.

"You are right, Ursula," she said. "We must be content to be trials, if we cannot be blessings. But that will never be your lot, I feel. God has bestowed upon you health and energy, and you are willing, I know, to make a good use of them."

"I hope so, Ma'am, I should like to make them useful to you now, if you would let me. I shall have a fortnight clear, whilst Roger is in London, before I shall be called to do anything for myself, and if you were thinking of moving, I might be able to assist Miss Milicent in packing."

"But, Ursula," she slowly raised her eyes with a look of fear, "you are not going way? Milicent told me she had offered you a home. You could have it as long as you liked; and no one would ask you to do anything you did not like."

"It is not that, Ma'am," I replied. "I hope, if I had duties to attend to, I should not think about liking or disliking; but I don't see my way to remaining for long, and that is why I should be glad to help you to settle yourself elsewhere now, before I leave."

"Milicent! where is Milicent?" Mrs. Weir laid her hand upon a little silver bell, which was one of the many ornaments of her table.

"Perhaps, Ma'am," I said, "we might be able to manage the matter without Miss Milicent. You are the person who must decide."

"Yes, I know—but Milicent,—I wish she would come."

"If you tell Miss Milicent your wish, she will agree to it I am sure, Ma'am," I continued. "I heard her say to Mr. Richardson the other day, that she only desired you to go where you would be most comfortable."

"They will not let me go abroad, Ursula; that is the only thing I ask for."

"They don't see where you are to go to, Ma'am," I replied; "and whilst you are thinking about that, there is something else to be done just before your eyes, if you will be good enough to look at it."

"I do not object to the house at Compton," she answered, "I never said I did, only it is far from the church."

"Yes, but not so far as this; and Miss Milicent is a good walker, and it does not much matter to you, Ma'am."

"No, Ursula, you are right there."

"And you would be near Mr. Richardson, Ma'am."

"Yes." Her eyes brightened. "Perhaps he would come and see me oftener then."

"And it is better than going quite away," I continued, whilst I watched the expression of the poor lady's face, hoping to see some expression of interest; but just then, to my great annoyance, in rushed Miss Milicent.

"Well, mother!—Ursie! I am glad you are here.—I have been over the hill to Compton, and seen the house. They won't let us have it for less than fifty pounds unfurnished, and seventy-five furnished. I say it is a shame; but there is nothing else to be had; so I have been to Mr. Richardson, and he is coming up here to-morrow, and you have only to say yes to him, mother, and then he will see the landlord in Hove on Wednesday, and settle it, and we can move in by next Monday."

Miss Milicent stuck her hands in her pockets, and leaned against the mantelpiece. Mrs. Weir sank back in her chair, extinguished.

"It was just what Mrs. Weir and I were talking of, Miss Milicent," I said. "Mrs. Weir seems to think that Compton will be the best place."

"Of course; there is nothing else to be done."

"And you would not prefer any other place, Ma'am?" I said.

Miss Milicent looked daggers at me, and beckoned me out of the room.

Instead of attending to her at once, I waited for Mrs. Weir's answer.

"I do not know, Ursula; it comes so quickly; but it will all be right."

Miss Milicent turned round at the door. "Ursie, there is some packing I want to talk to you about."

I followed her; she closed the door behind her.

"Are you a fool, Ursie Grant? What do you mean by putting notions into my mother's head? The house at Compton is taken."

"Is it quite, Miss Milicent?" I said; "surely it is for Mrs. Weir to decide."

"Decide! it is decided. She has nothing to do but to say, yes. She is not fit for more, you see."

"You will excuse me, I hope, Miss Milicent," I replied, "but it seems to me that Mrs. Weir will never be fit to say even, yes, for herself, whilst no one gives her the opportunity of saying, no."

Any one else might have been angry at my boldness, but I will do Miss Milicent the justice to own that she always allowed other people to be as free spoken as she was herself.

"There is nothing for her to say, no, about," she replied. "What she wishes is to go to Compton, and it is what the trustees, and Mr. Richardson, and all consider to be best."

"I only thought it was respectful to ask Mrs. Weir's opinion," was my reply. "But I beg your pardon for interfering, Miss Milicent; it is no business of mine."

She scarcely heeded the remark; but, as I was moving away, she caught me by the arm, and said, "There is a room for you at Compton, Ursie Grant."

"Thank you, Miss Milicent; but I am afraid it won't quite suit me to use it."

"But it will be ready for you; I am going to have a bed put up."

"You are very good; but I must see what my duties at Sandcombe are first."

"You have no duties at Sandcombe, Ursie, none half so great as staying with us and helping my mother. Mr. Richardson and I settled it was the best thing you could do."

My spirit was up then, and I felt my cheek flush.

"I thank you for troubling yourself about me, Miss Milicent," I said, "but I think it might be better for me to decide for myself. If you please, I will let you know what I determine by next Thursday." And making an excuse of business, that I might not be urged any more, I hurried away.

CHAPTER XIX.

The next day I went over to Sandcombe. Little as I fancied taking advice from Leah, I yet felt that it would be right to hear what her ideas were as to giving me a home there, and whether I should be a help or a burden to her. Besides, it was Roger's wish that I should talk matters over with her and William, and though I should have liked to go my own way independently, it did not seem right to keep aloof from relations.

There was plenty of work going on in the farm-yard and the out-houses, but the house itself seemed dull as I went in. I missed Jessie Lee's voice. When she was there she was generally to be heard singing, and the notes were like a bird's, they were so sweet; but it was all silent now, except the sound of my own footsteps as I walked up the stone passage. I went straight to the little parlour, and knocked, thinking I should be sure to find Leah there. It was William who said "Come in;" and when I went in, I found them both together, looking as though something was very much amiss.

Leah broke out directly, scarcely allowing time for William to shake hands: "Here is a fuss, Ursie; Jessie has been as good as brought up by us, and now mother is going to take her quite away. So that we are not to depend upon her any more. It is too hard, after all the trouble I have had with her; but mother complains of feeling lonely."

This was not surprising, for Mr. Morris had died shortly before, and Mrs. Morris had left the farm, and was living in a comfortable little house, in Hatton, whilst her son was trying farming in a distant county.

"I thought we shouldn't be allowed to keep Jessie much longer," said William; "especially now Mrs. Morris is ill."

"It is only rheumatism; she will be well enough before long," said Leah; "and, of course," she added, seeing, I suspect, that I looked a little ashamed of her cool way of talking, "I shouldn't mind giving her up for a time, just till mother is well; but I had put off getting extra help, quite depending upon Jessie; and now there is hay-making

scarcely over, and harvest coming on, and ever so much to be done, and I have not a creature to look to."

My heart sank; I saw which way things were tending, and I don't think I knew till then how I dreaded the notion of a home at Sandcombe. I made no answer, and Leah went on with her complaints.

"The new girl wants a sharp eye upon her, and I can't be in two places at once, and Jessie looked after the dairy, and took the poultry quite off my hands, and was a very fair cook, thanks to my teaching. It is too hard that she should be taken from me at a moment's notice."

"Another girl will only be another mouth to feed," said William, decidedly. "We have too many about the place already; Farmer Kemp does with one, and I don't see why we shouldn't."

Leah bit her lip, and observed that she had not married to be made a slave, and have the Kemps thrown in her face always. Mrs. Kemp had Mary to help her, and she was worth fifty girls.

"Well then, here is Ursie," said William, trying to look very good-natured and disinterested. "She is coming to make a home here, and I am sure she will be willing enough to work for her board."

A fair proposal it was; but Roger would not have said it. I answered, cautiously, "You must not depend upon me, William; Mrs. Weir wants me to stay with her."

"Stay with Mrs. Weir; why she has scarcely butter enough for her own bread, much less for yours," exclaimed Leah. "You are not going to be such a goose, Ursie, as to stay with her!"

"I suppose I am not likely to get much more than butter here," I replied, laughing. "You are not going to hire me as your servant; neither you nor Mrs. Weir are. In both places I should be required to work for my board; and at Mrs. Weir's I might have time to make a little money over and above for myself, by needle-work."

"And what is to hinder you from having time here?" replied Leah.

"Jessie had none," I answered. "If I am to work as hard as Jessie, I shall not be better off."

I could not help saying this, for I had always felt that it was a shame for them to put so much upon Jessie, and not let her have any help when they could very well afford it.

"She does not want to come," said William, speaking to Leah, in a vexed tone; "that is the long and the short of the matter."

He was quite right; but I ought not to have let it out. I was wrong, as I always was when I did not like things or people. No wonder that I was often called ungracious. I tried to correct myself, and answered, "Please don't say that, William; the long and the short of the matter, as you call it, is, that it is my duty to do the best I can for myself during Roger's absence. I have a fair supply of needle-work now, and could get more, and that is what I have to look to to keep me in clothes, unless I take from the little I have laid by, which is against Roger's wish, and my own too. Wherever I go I must either be paid for my services or have certain times to myself, and it would only be deceiving you to pretend to come here and take Jessie's place, when I could not take Jessie's duties."

"Then what did you think of doing if you came here?" asked Leah, sharply.

"I had not thought much about it," I replied. I could not say more, for my voice was quite choked.

I think William perceived what I felt, for he said in a tone of excuse, "Of course, Ursie, we should not talk of your working for your board if we could help it, and if we didn't know it would make you more comfortable. But we are sure you would never bear to be a burden, and this has been a bad year, you see; the hay is poor, and little enough of it; and turnips want rain; and our wheat is not looking half as well as that on the other side of Hove; and, what with the repairs of the cottages, and the lawyer's expenses which have come from Roger's whim, I am likely to find myself short at Christmas. I thought you and Roger would have understood this, and would have been willing to lend a helping hand."

"I am willing, quite willing," I exclaimed, "I wouldn't be indebted"—I was going to be ungracious again, but something brought the thought of Mrs. Weir and her patient

gentleness to my mind, and I added quietly, "If I do come to you, William, I don't think you will ever find me unwilling to lend a helping hand to the utmost. I should be bound to do it, just as I was bound to help Roger. But it would be foolish to promise to take a girl's place, or do the things Jessie did, because I should require to have some time to myself in the afternoons. That is all I meant to say."

"And that would do very well, Leah, wouldn't it?" said William, and he walked to the door, and waited with the handle in his hand, impatient to be gone.

"If Ursie wasn't so uppish, she would have seen long ago that it was all we wanted," said Leah; "I don't understand myself what all the fuss has been about."

"Nor I neither," said William, and he came back and kissed me. "You know, Ursie, if I was a rich man you should have a home here as long as you liked, just for the asking."

"Thank you, William. When Roger and I are in Canada, whether we are rich or poor, you shall have a home without the asking."

William went off quickly, trying to hum a tune, which somehow I don't think came quite easily. Leah turned to me rather sharply. "What did you mean, Ursie, just now, by saying you were going to stay with Mrs. Weir, when she won't have a house over her head? Dene is to be sold, and the whole estate is mortgaged up to its full value and over, and there is to be a subscription raised for Mrs. Weir amongst her friends, and Miss Milicent is going out as a governess."

I burst into a fit of laughter, which made Leah quite angry. "It is very well for you to laugh," she said, "but it's true. I had it from the best authority; of course they don't tell you everything; why should they? But you will find it so; and as for your notion of living with Mrs. Weir, you might as well think of living with the man in the moon."

"I am not sure that I shan't think of living with him soon," I replied. "There will be a chance of hearing less gossip and more truth there than here. Jane Shaw, I suppose, told you this nonsense."

"And she is more likely to know than any one else," answered Leah, "seeing she is to be mistress of Dene."

I waited before answering, for, often lately as I had heard Jane's prospects spoken of, I could not yet make up my mind to take the notion patiently.

"The wedding is to come off the end of September," continued Leah, anxious to pour out all she knew. "Captain Price's sisters and an aunt are coming, and a good many gentlemen friends, and Jane is thinking already about her dress, Jessie says. I don't believe, though, for my part, that Dene will be ready for them by that time. There will be a good deal to do with papering, and painting, and furnishing, after the old lady is gone. Jane says she is not going to be particular, and they can wait for the new dining-room furniture till next year, but I don't fancy they will when it comes to the point. By the by, Ursie, you must be upon your best behaviour, and remember to say Miss Shaw now. Jessie tells me Jane quite expects it."

"I am very willing," I answered. "She would never have been Jane Shaw to me, if I had not known her from a child. Is there anything I can do for you in Hatton, Leah? I am going on there to get a few things for the house."

"Nothing; unless—well, you might, perhaps, carry a parcel over to Jessie. She left a gown here, and a pair of shoes."

One of the farm boys lived at Hatton, and might very well have taken the parcel, but I was unwilling to appear unkind. Besides, it saved Leah a penny; for the child might have expected something for his trouble. I knew she would not forget that.

"And when are you coming, Ursie?" was Leah's gracious invitation at parting.

"I will let you know, when I have settled about Mrs. Weir," I replied. "Good-bye," and, burdened with my parcel, I departed.

I made my way up the cart-road to the top of the down, and then sat down to rest for a few minutes, and if I could, to think. I was in a greater perplexity than before, for I felt as though I had been drawn on farther than I intended. My only thought in going over to Sandcome was to find out

whether William and Leah really wished me to stay with them, and were likely to be in any way hearty about it. In that case, and if they had thrown themselves at all into my position, I could have talked over everything openly and easily. But this fashion of bargaining, and making the most of me, threw me back upon myself. It was no use to ask advice of people who were only bent upon seeing things their own way, for their own advantage. I could, indeed, write to Roger, but it might make ill-will between him and William to explain what I felt, and that would never do, especially just as he was going away from England, perhaps never to come back again. If a disagreeable thing is to be done, the fewer people there are concerned in it the better. Moreover, at the bottom of my heart lay a doubt as to what Roger would say. He would very likely tell me that it was a safe home, and that I had better be patient and bear up, and it would soon be over, and I should join him in Canada.

But that would be his man's way of looking at the great end, and not seeing the little steps by which it is to be reached; and I never shut my eyes as he did to the possibility that the day for me to join him in Canada might never come, and that the step I was going to take now was one which must have an influence upon my future life.

I hated Sandcombe. I really don't think the word is too strong. I did not hate William and Leah, but I hated all their ways of looking at things.

When I was with them I felt, as it were, unable to breathe. I had to think of every word I said, and check even the tone of my voice, lest I should show the feelings which would rise up in spite of myself, and must, I knew, give offence. A room to myself in a cottage would have been Paradise compared to a home at Sandcombe. And there was Mrs. Weir in great trouble, and wanting me; and even Miss Milicent setting her heart upon having me. There seemed no question which would be the best. Let William and Leah, and even Roger, say what they might, I would make up my mind to remain with Mrs. Weir.

If only I had not disliked Sandcombe quite so much! It was the one thing which made me pause.

As I sat upon the hill, meaning every minute to walk

on, and yet tempted to rest a little longer, I heard the soft sounds of horses' hoofs upon the turf. Two men were cantering across the down, from the direction of Hatton gate. As they came nearer, I knew them to be Farmer Kemp and John Hervey.

They passed me at first without knowing me; but, immediately afterwards, I heard John say, "Why, there is Ursie Grant!" and he turned his horse and rode up to me, and the Farmer trotted up after him.

"Here, all alone, lassie!" called out the Farmer, as he drew in his horse. "I should never have expected to see you sitting, doing nothing, so early in the day."

"Only resting," I replied, and I stood up. "I have been to Sandcombe, and I am going on to Hatton."

"And carrying a good-sized load with you," said John, looking at Jessie's parcel.

"Not a very heavy one," I answered, and I smiled a little; but I suppose the smile was not a very hearty one, for the Farmer changed his tone directly, as he said, "You are not doing well for yourself, Ursie; you had much better come down to Longside, and have a talk with my goodwoman; it will do you more good than thinking."

"I have some things to buy at the grocer's, at Hatton," I said, "and here is Jessie Lee's parcel to be taken to her; I don't think I can come to Longside to-day."

"It wouldn't take me ten minutes to ride back with the parcel," said John very good-naturedly; "but I don't know so well about the grocer. What is to be done there, Ursie? My housekeeping has been on a small scale hitherto, so I am not up to the needs of a family."

"Then it is time you should learn," said the Farmer, sharply, but laughing as he spoke. "Don't you think so, Ursie? It is not every man who has a wife he can trust to manage her own housekeeping."

"He is a foolish man who marries a wife he can't trust, I replied.

John laughed merrily, and said I had made a good answer, and he quite agreed with me; and if ever he married a woman who couldn't go to the grocer's, he should think he deserved the fate of a fool.

"The fate of George Price, Esq., when he marries Miss Jane Shaw," said the Farmer, twirling his whip in the air. "If ever there was a man bent upon riding to ruin, full gallop, it's that young jackanapes. There must be something in the air of Dene that's catching. But come, Ursie, hand up your parcel to John, and turn back with me. I can walk my horse, and you shall tell me about Roger."

It was a great temptation; a kind word and a friendly thought were so specially dear to me just then; but I was in a difficulty as to managing my purchases at the grocer's.

John Hervey noticed my hesitation. "Shopping and all," he said; "I can manage it, Ursie."

"I have known you long enough to be sure of that," I replied.

"Don't trust him too far, though," said the Farmer. "He is well enough when there's no fun in the way, but let him get a scent of the hounds—they are out to-day—and your parcel would go to the winds, and the grocer's business after it. I vow that mare understands; she pricks up her ears at the very name."

"I would trust Mr. Hervey, hounds or no hounds," I said; "if he undertook it he would do it."

John's face, which was like a sunbeam generally, clouded over for a moment. I thought I had been too bold, and spoken as if I was his equal; which I was not, for he was a man when I was a child, and I had always been taught to look up to him.

"I should not like to give you the trouble, though, Mr. Hervey," I said. "Mary Kemp and I might be able to walk over to Hatton, late."

The mare was becoming restive, and John jumped off and caught up the parcel from the ground. "Now, Ursie, the list; I shall overtake you before you are at Longside."

I had the paper inside my glove, and I took it out and gave it to him. He returned me such a squeeze of the hand. I cried out, and we both laughed; and he was mounted again, with the parcel before him, and galloping towards Hatton gate, before I had time to put my glove on.

"A capital good fellow!" said the Farmer, "and a merry one too! Now, lassie, step out, and my Dobbin shall step in, and so we'll keep together."

CHAPTER XX.

Farmer Kemp and I had but little conversation upon anything specially important to me, on our way to Longside. I told him what I knew about Roger's plans, but it was little use to consult him about Mrs. Weir and Leah. It was not in his way to give advice upon such matters, and the very reason he was taking me back with him to Longside was, that I might talk things over with his wife and Mary. But in his honest, kind-hearted way, he showed me true sympathy; even when he talked about his own concerns, such as draining, and horse-hoeing, and drilling, he had always a word to say about Roger and his prospects, and it cheered me to hear him speak of the probability of his doing well as almost a certainty. Not that Farmer Kemp knew much about Canada, or how people farmed there; but I was in such a maze and doubt about everything that I clung even to straws for comfort.

The Farmer took me into the parlour at Longside, and sent Mary to fetch a piece of cake and a glass of wine, ordering, at the same time, a cup of ale for himself, with which he drank to my good health and good fortune, and a husband by that time twelvemonth; and then he kissed me on both cheeks, saying, "he didn't know why he wasn't to have an old man's privilege," and went away, tramping down the passage, calling for his wife, and singing the chorus of a harvest song.

Mrs. Kemp came in soon afterwards. Mary offered to go away, and I said nothing to prevent her, for I felt I might have things to mention about others which might seem unkind, and there was no need to have them poured into more ears than was necessary.

"Well, Ursie! so the Farmer says you are come to have a talk," said Mrs. Kemp; and she went to the cupboard, and fetched her work-box; and, sitting down in the leathern armchair, began to mend a pair of her husband's worsted stockings. "Can I help you, child? I am willing, as you know."

Something of a daughter's feeling towards a mother came over me, as I drew my seat towards her chair, and rested my hand upon the arm, and said, "Dear Mrs. Kemp, if I knew what was right to be done, I shouldn't care for anything."

"Except doing it, I suppose, you mean," she said.

"It would be easy enough to do, either way," I replied. "Roger says it is not to be for long; and the Farmer tells me it will all come right with him and me in the end. But it is the present time that is the difficulty,—whether to stay with Mrs. Weir, or go to Sandcombe;" and I told her all that had passed, and the offers I had had about both places. She listened very kindly; but when I stopped she made no answer.

"Well!" I said, a little impatiently.

"You have it in your heart, Ursie, to stay with Mrs. Weir."

"How do you know that?" I asked.

"From your way of putting things; and I don't say but that it is natural. Leah Grant's is not such a very tempting home, setting aside that it is your brother's."

"That makes it worse," I said; "if it was not my brother's I could put up with it; but the aggravation of one's own relations is past bearing."

"Well! it is hard, certainly; but it is God's will to give us relations."

"And it is His will that they should act as such, I suppose," was my reply.

"Surely; and I don't see quite how William Grant and his wife have failed. They will give you a home and be kind to you."

"Oh! Mrs. Kemp! please—I don't think you understand at all," I exclaimed. "If you had only been there and heard them——"

"I should have said they took things coolly," said Mrs. Kemp; "but I should not have thought they were wanting in duty."

"I don't care for duty; it is love I need."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Kemp, thoughtfully.

"Don't you know what I want?" I continued. "If I am to be left alone all this year, I must be with people who are fond of me."

"Oh!" again repeated Mrs. Kemp.

I was vexed with her; and I dare say showed it by my face; for I would not speak.

"Now don't be fretted, Ursie, dear," continued Mrs. Kemp, kindly. "You see I am not so quick at taking things in as some people are; and I must make out what you are aiming at before I can lend you a helping hand. If you want to know where you will be most cared for, that is one thing; but if you want to find out where it is right you should be, that is another."

"Then you are like Roger, and all the rest," I exclaimed; "you would have me go and be a slave at Sandcombe, dancing attendance upon Leah's whims, and not getting, 'thank you,' for my pains; and you would have me leave poor Mrs. Weir in her trouble, and Miss Milicent not knowing in the least how to manage for her. Poor lady! she may die, for aught I know, if she is left to Miss Milicent's care."

"Well! but Ursie, child," exclaimed Mrs. Kemp, looking up in surprise, "she has had no one but Miss Milicent to look after her these many years."

"Oh! but it was different then; she was in less trouble, and she had not been accustomed to depend upon me so much; and her husband was at home; and—it was quite different then—it was indeed."

"She was in less trouble," said Mrs. Kemp; "that is true; she must want more comfort just now. But, Ursie,—then you have a notion of living with her always."

"I! dear Mrs. Kemp, how could such a thought enter your head?"

"Only, my dear, you said she was becoming accustomed to depend upon you; and I fancied what it would be next year, when you would probably have to leave her."

"I must let next year take care of itself," I replied; "she must learn then to do without me."

"Well! yes, that may be the best way. But, perhaps, in that case, she might learn to do without you now." Seeing that I made no reply, Mrs. Kemp went on, taking my hand kindly, and fixing her sweet brown eyes on my face, as though begging me to bear with her if she said things I disliked to hear. "My dear, I don't want to cross you. There

is not much need to tell you that; but you have no mother, and I would fain be one to you. You see, it strikes me that you have rather a twisty way of looking at this matter, to suit your own wishes, which are natural enough and right enough in their way. If you settle to stay with Mrs. Weir, because she can't do without you this year, you will have just the same reason for staying with her next year; and a much stronger one, because you will have made yourself more needful to her. But you would be unwilling, I suppose, to remain then."

"It would be out of the question," I exclaimed; "I must go to Roger."

"And, any how,—if Roger were to marry, and yet offer you a home,—you would go to him?"

"Yes, I must. I could never live away from Roger."

"But there would be just the same claim, as far as Mrs. Weir is concerned," said Mrs. Kemp.

"She is not my relation," I observed.

"No; that is just what I was thinking. She is not a relation; she is a claim and a duty when you like it, but not when you don't like it."

I felt the colour mount to my cheeks.

"Then you would never have one put friends before relations," I exclaimed, "let the friends be never so kind, and the relations never so cross?"

"I would try to take life as God has made it," was the answer.

"And go to Sandcombe?" I continued.

"Perhaps not just yet. I think it is all very true that Mrs. Weir wants a little comfort now; and I would stay and give it her if I could, for a certain time; may be a month or six weeks, or any time you choose, till she is settled in her new home. But, Ursie, if you will take my advice, you will be careful not to put yourself too forward in some things. You are not Mrs. Weir's daughter."

"No," I exclaimed, and I laughed. "Fancy if she or Miss Milicent were to hear you say that; as if it could be possible. Why the Weirs are as proud as princes."

"Pride goes to the wall when folks are in need of comfort," said Mrs. Kemp. "But, putting aside that, it is a

thing I have learnt from a good many years' thought and trouble, that to take other persons' duties from them is a course which never has God's blessing upon it. People say —I don't ask you, for it is wrong to pry—but people do say that Miss Milicent is not as careful of her mother as she might be, and as she ought to be. There can't be a worse sin in a quiet way than that, Ursie; and if you help her to continue in it, why you will share the guilt."

This was quite a new way of looking at the case, and it touched my conscience; for I knew that lately Miss Milicent had left off doing many things for her mother which at one time she had been accustomed to attend to.

"And so you think I should do harm by staying," I exclaimed.

"It is just this," continued Mrs. Kemp; "I think the question for us to consider is scarcely ever whether we shall do harm or good anywhere,—for I don't believe we can judge about it; but only to find out where God sends us, and then go."

"Of course! of course!" I exclaimed. "Who ever wants anything else?"

"I should have said," replied Mrs. Kemp, "that most of us think first where we wish to go, and then look to see if God hasn't sent us, and that makes all the difference. Mr. Richardson preached a sermon about Balaam last Sunday, and Farmer and I, when we came home, both said we thought we had been Balaams many times in our lives."

"And I am like Balaam now, then," I said, half-amused, yet half-angry.

Mrs. Kemp laughed a little to, as she answered, "Well! there is the relation—a very near one—a brother, willing to have you, and wishing it; and there is his wife left without help and society, and likely to find you useful, and there is Roger looking upon Sandcombe as your natural home, and leaving you under William's care. It was not you who ordered these things."

"Nor I who ordered Mrs. Weir's troubles," I replied.

"No; but God made you William Grant's sister, and Miss Milicent Mrs. Weir's daughter. That is as much as to say one is to help one, and the other the other."

"And I am to take Jessie's place, then," I said. "I shall not do much for myself in that case."

"Oh, Ursie! you were always a *contrary* child," exclaimed Mrs. Kemp, in a vexed tone. "Don't you see that a difficulty about that would alter the whole case. William and Leah must understand. If they won't give you time to work for yourself, and Mrs. Weir will, why that settles the question at once; not because of your liking or disliking, or thinking you will be better or do more good in one place than another; but only because God has so ordered it, that it is needful for you to do something for yourself, that you mayn't be using up the little that is put by for a rainy day, and so at last come to be a burden on your friends."

I knew that quite as well as Mrs. Kemp; it was just what I had said to Leah, but somehow it did not come home to me pleasantly. I would so much rather have gone to Mrs. Weir with the idea of helping her than of doing what was good for myself.

I sat still for some seconds and thought; then I got up and said, I was very much obliged for the advice, and I would think about it.

"Ah! Ursie, lassie; you are not inclined to see the matter my way," exclaimed Mrs. Kemp, "and I am sure I would fain see it yours if I could; but you will never help Mrs. Weir if you begin by being a bone of contention with your own relations."

"I will think about it; I dare say you are right. Dear Mrs. Kemp, I don't mean to be ungrateful, but I am very unhappy." I could not help saying it, and the good woman laid her hand upon mine in a fondling way, and said she was so sorry; and then we had a long talk about Sandcombe, and the ways of going on, and how I might help in mending matters if I went there; and before we parted I felt I might be just as useful there as with Mrs. Weir, and was heartily glad that the point was to be settled by William and Leah, and not by me.

There was little doubt what the end would be now; in fact, the next day, a few words with William, who came over to Dene to see me, decided it. I could do fairly well with

him alone, and he was kind enough in his way of putting things, and told me that Leah was quite willing to agree to the plan of my having time to myself after dinner, if I would only make myself useful in the morning, and look to the dairy and poultry, and see a little to the cooking. I had a misgiving that I should be put upon still, and I asked how Leah was going to manage about the other things which Jessie had been accustomed to attend to; but I found that they had settled to have help from a girl who was to come every now and then, when she was wanted; and, as William said, Jessie was not always with them, and so, if I was there, Leah would not be really worse off than before.

He looked quite pleased when everything was arranged, and talked so much about Sandcombe being my home, and how he had always wanted me to come, that before he went away I really did begin to think he had been very good-natured and brotherly about it, and I am quite sure he thought so himself. But when he was gone, oh dear! Happily I had not much time for thought, except to be thankful that, at any rate, I had not pleased myself.

CHAPTER XXI.

Mrs. Weir's new house was not exactly in Compton; it might have been pleasanter for her if it had been. She would have been nearer the church and the parsonage. I don't know that I could describe the situation well to any one acquainted with the neighbourhood, and who did not know the kind of country that lay on the other side of St. Anne's Hill, between it and the sea. But supposing a person was standing on the top of St. Anne's facing the sea, and then was to go down the hill on that side, he would come to the top of a steep, jagged cliff, broken into uneven ledges, bare and sharp, except where here and there some green plant had taken root in the crevices, and managed to grow in spite of the fury of the south-west winds, which, in these parts, are the fiercest winds that blow.

Before coming to the top of the cliffs, it seems that there

is nothing between them and the sea, but on reaching the edge there is a sight which makes a stranger start. For below lies, not the sea, but a broad tract of land, tossed up and down in little hills and valleys. It is scattered all over with huge rocks, which look as though giants had thrown them about in their play, and it slopes down in a steep descent towards the top of a second range of cliffs. This range cannot, of course, be discovered immediately underneath the upper cliffs, but it can be traced towards the west for many miles, forming the outline of Compton Bay. A dreary-looking country it is, but it has a charm even for that very reason. As a child I only saw it occasionally, and always thought of it as connected with haunts of smugglers, and wild storms; roaring waves, and shipwrecks, and heavy sea mists, gathering over the hills, and shutting out the light which was the only hope of the seaman's safety. It must have been a fierce time on earth when the land sank away from the upper cliffs, and the great rocks were hurled down, and the streams, which have now worked their way through the lower cliffs, and formed deep chasms, first began to flow. But those days are not within the memory of man that I ever heard. Yet even now it is solemn to stand and think of what once has been. When I first remember that part of the country it was, so to say, unknown and untraversed. There was no road through it. Persons wishing to go from Hatton to Compton had to go up Hatton lane, and over the hill; only foot-passengers went over the cliffs, and with them it was a difficult task to find their way, especially on a dark night. They might stumble among the rocks, or wander to the edge of the cliffs, and be over before they were aware of it. Some people, at that time, thought it an unsafe country to live in, and said that the rocks would fall again; but there was little enough really to fear, though certainly things did seem terrible to those who were unaccustomed to them.

Perhaps the country looks all the more wild from the contrast with that which immediately adjoins it. For to the east of St. Anne's Hill, just beyond Hatton, the land turns towards the south, and the warm sun shines full upon it. The ground is tossed about still in every direction, and huge rocks lie scattered upon it. But thorns, and chestnuts, and

ash trees have sprung up amongst them upon the greensward, ivy has climbed up the ledges of the jagged cliffs; primroses cluster upon the banks; cowslips glitter on the turf; and masses of hyacinths may be seen in glades, half hidden by the foliage of the thick trees, and through which the jutting masses of grey rock peep out upon the open sea, sparkling with silver and blue, some hundreds of feet beneath them.

A lovely scene it is. There is a verse spoken of a very different country, which often comes to my mind when I think of it. "It is a land which the Lord thy God careth for. The Eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year." Sometimes it has even seemed to me that Heaven itself can scarcely be more beautiful. But that is, doubtless, the thought of my ignorance, and the love which I bear to all things connected with the memories of my youth.

But I must go back to Compton and Mrs. Weir. I have said that in former days there was no direct road from Hatton to Compton; a few years, however, before the time of which I am writing, it had been determined to make one under the upper cliff, at a great expense, and, as some persons thought, uselessly. That, however, was soon proved to be a mistake. Some speculating people bought up part of the land, and built an hotel and lodging-houses upon it, and Compton Heath, as the place was called, was like to become, in time, an inhabited part of the world. It signified little enough to Mrs. Weir where she went, for she was not likely to move out of the house often, when once she was settled in it; yet I could not help wishing that she had something more quiet and homelike to look out upon than that broad sea, without a ship to be seen upon it, and the bare rocks upon the heath. There was, indeed, a beautiful view of the white cliffs in the distance; but everything immediately about the place, though grand, was desolate; except, indeed, the garden; but even that was new, and not likely to be kept in very good order by the old man who was in charge of it. He and his wife had the care of the place before Mrs. Weir took it, and they were to live there still, and the woman was to do the cooking, and the man the gardening. Miss Milicent and I went many times backwards and for-

wards over the hill, from Dene to the Heath, before we had made the place at all what we thought Mrs. Weir would think comfortable. Mrs. Richardson helped us as well as she could: but she was busy in the parish with the poor people, and at home with her children, and had but little time to spare; and, indeed, it would have been unfair to expect her to do much. I found the neighbours very kind; the people at the hotel lent us a helping hand, and the Lieutenant, at the Preventive Station, and his wife, took an interest in our goings on. I don't know how Miss Milicent became acquainted with them, but somehow she managed to know every one; and I was rather glad to think that when she and her mother were settled in that out-of-the-way place, they would have a man friend near to apply to in a difficulty.

I had never yet told Mrs. Weir exactly what my plans were, but I had given her to understand that I could not live with her for a continuance, and she took the notion more quietly than I had expected. As she said, she never looked forward, and I was with her for the time, and that was enough. But Miss Milicent was different. I had a struggle with her especially, the day before all was arranged for the move. I was to go over to the Heath in the afternoon, and she and her mother were to follow the next morning. First of all I had thought that it would be better to stay and help the poor lady to the last at Dene; but Mrs. Kemp's hint was remembered, though I did not like it when it was given. Cotton, the lady's maid, was going to stay, so that Mrs. Weir would have all the help in the way of dressing and nursing that she usually had; and no doubt it was Miss Milicent's duty to look after her mother herself. She managed it in a certain way before I was even known to them, and so she ought to be able to manage it still. I said as much as this to her, only I hope civilly, when she suggested that it would be better for her to go and sleep at the Parsonage that night, and walk up to the Heath early the next morning, and get everything ready by the time her mother and I came in the afternoon.

"Mrs. Weir is used to you in moving from home, Miss Milicent," I said, "and she is not used to me; maybe she would rather have you."

"Now, Ursie Grant, you know that is not true," she answered; "whatever I am good for, it is not nursing, and I don't want to put myself forward in it."

"This is not quite nursing," I replied, "and anyhow, Miss Milicent, as Mrs. Weir has nobody but you to look to for the future, it won't do to be out of the habit of helping her."

"I am so busy," she said; "I told Mr. Perry (that was the preventive lieutenant), that I should be over at the Heath the first thing to-morrow morning, and bring Williams, the carpenter, with me, and then we would see about putting up some shelves, and unpacking the books."

"I can take a message to Mr. Perry, if it is needful," I said; "and I thought of sleeping in the house, and so I should be there to see about getting coffee when Mrs. Weir arrived. I think I could show Jenny Dale how she likes it."

"That old Jenny won't be able to make coffee or anything else to suit my mother's whimsies," exclaimed Miss Milicent: "she is as particular as a Queen, as you know well enough, Ursie."

"I could try and teach Jenny," I said; "and if not, Miss Milicent, you will be there the next day, and then I might show you."

"And why can't you do it yourself, Ursie? you are not used to be so cross-grained." And Miss Milicent turned round upon me sharply, with a look as of twenty eyes put into one.

"If it was so ordered that I could wait upon Mrs. Weir always, it would be different," I replied, "but as I must needs leave her before very long, Miss Milicent, it would be better and kinder surely to put some one else in the way of pleasing her; and if Jenny Dale can't make the coffee and you don't like to learn yourself, Cotton might try."

"I tell you what, Ursie," exclaimed Miss Milicent angrily, "I don't take it kind of you to make all this fuss about going away just at the very time we have most need of you; it is not what I should have expected of you, having known you so many years, and always being friends up to this time. It is very hard, very hard indeed."

"It is not my wish, Miss Milicent," I replied, trying to

speak gently, though I must confess her tone irritated me, "but I have taken the advice of friends. One thing I can promise, if you will allow it—not to leave Mrs. Weir till she is really settled comfortably at the Heath, and able to go on by herself."

"And that will be never," exclaimed Miss Milicent. "Don't you see that my mother is getting more full of whims and nervousness every day? And what am I to do with her? She never did attend to me."

"Perhaps because you never fell into her ways," I ventured to say.

"You speak ignorantly, Ursie Grant," replied Miss Milicent, more quietly. "You have never known my mother as I have. Her ways, as you call them, have been for years ways which no one with a grain of sense could fall into, and they would have been twenty times worse but for me. Other people"—Miss Milicent stopped, I don't think she liked to mention her father's name—"other people scolded her one minute and humoured her the next; that did no good."

"It might have been better," I said, "to humour her in the things that were rational, and try to persuade her out of those which were not."

She waited before answering, and the colour rose in her cheeks; then she said, "You are right there, Ursie. But persons who humour and persuade must be made of different stuff from me. I can't, and that is the truth, and so I must e'en go my way, and my mother must go hers; and things must be managed as they can; though how that is to be when you leave us is more than I can say."

I felt for her. There was something about her which always touched me, when she changed from that sharp, headstrong manner, to be in any way true and humble. It was a glimpse of a beautiful, better nature, lying, as it were, at the bottom of a deep sea tossed with tempests. And I knew too that she must have had a great deal to bear all her life long. Persons out of the family could put up with Mrs. Weir's oddities easily enough, but it was not so with those whose daily life was troubled by them. The whims of friends are an amusement; those of relations are trials. Only one thing I saw then, that Miss Milicent deceived herself by saying

"can't" and "must." I believe there are not two more treacherous words in the English language. I did not say I would stay, though it was a strong temptation; but I repeated again that I was very sorry for her, and that I would take care not to leave her till Mrs. Weir was comfortable. I added though, that she must please let me go over to the Heath, for the work to be done there was much more fitting for me than for her.

She gave in, I do believe, because she was taken by surprise to find a will stronger than her own; and about six o'clock that evening I took my bundle under my arm, and left Dene never again to return to it as my home.

CHAPTER XXII.

The clouds were gathering and the wind was rising as I crossed the down at the foot of St. Anne's Hill. I thought we should have a stormy night, indeed I was very certain of it, for there was the noise of a ground-swell telling me more plainly than words. I walked on quickly, not exactly disliking the work before me, though feeling how strange it all was. I should have been miserable if I had gone direct from Dene to Sandcombe, but this go-between life softened matters, and there was something in the notion of being left to settle and decide things for myself and for others too, and in a certain fashion make my own way in the world, which gave me energy. As for Dene, the spirit of the place had departed when Roger left it. I loved the old familiar scenes dearly—it would be hard to say how dearly—but after he was gone I looked on them as upon the face of a friend who is dead. I knew I had better leave them, and remember them only as they were in the days of my peaceful happiness; and I thanked God from my heart for the blessings He had granted me whilst living amongst them.

I made my way down a rough bank at the foot of the down, and then along a field into the high road, and so up to Heath Cottage, that was the name of Mrs. Weir's new house. I mention the path I took, because it gives me an opportunity

of saying what I did not before, that the high, broken, upper cliffs ended just above the cottage; they seemed to break off by degrees and lose themselves in the slope of the down, so that the way I came was easy enough for a young person, though the descent from the down was very steep.

I thought, as I entered the garden, that the place was not half so trim as the grounds at Dene. The little bit of road and the sweep were full of rough stones, and the grass on the banks wanted mowing. I determined that should be done the first thing in the morning. Mrs. Weir's neat eye would never bear the look of the place as it was, though Miss Milicent would have lived there for years and never have thought about it. I saw no one at work about the garden, and when I went up to the house, and rang the bell, I waited a most provokingly long time for an answer. At length a little girl appeared, Jenny Dale's grandchild, who I knew was often with her. She stared at me with a pair of very blue eyes, and opened her mouth, but said nothing.

"Well, Polly! how d'ye do?" I said. "Where's Granny. Can't I come in?"

"Granny's bad," was the answer.

"Bad! I'm sorry for that. I must go and speak to her. Where is she?"

"She's a-bed."

"So ill as that? How long has she been there?"

"Yesterday, and t'other day."

"But I saw her the day before yesterday," I said; "she didn't seem ill then. Has the doctor been here?"

"I don't know, she's a-bed;" was the only reply I could obtain; so I asked no more questions, but went in.

Jenny Dale was neat in her way, and her kitchen was comfortable enough generally—but Polly being left to play there, had made it very untidy. The fire was burning low, and the tea-kettle had been taken off it, and was standing within the fender. A little deal table, with some crusts of bread soaked in spilt tea, and some cups waiting to be washed, were the signs that Dale and his grandchild had been having their meal together; but grandfather, I was told, was gone out, and Polly didn't know where he was gone, or when he meant to return,—in fact she didn't know anything, except that Granny was a-bed.

'And where is Granny sleeping?" I asked.

"Up yon!" and Polly pointed to a corner of the kitchen, where I saw nothing but the dish-covers upon the dresser.

There was a little room over one of the out-houses, as I knew, so I guessed what was meant; and putting some coals on the fire, I told Polly to wash up the tea-things, and make the place tidy; and up-stairs I went.

I heard a low groaning before I reached the top of the steep little staircase, and when I entered the bedroom, I had no need to be told that "Granny was very bad." She was lying on a mattress on the floor, turning and rolling from side to side, with an attack of feverish cold and rheumatism. The wind, which was beginning to howl every minute louder and louder, poured down in gusts from the little fire-place, close at the head of the bed, so that she had the full benefit of it. The room itself was draughty enough for a person in health; there was but one window, but that shook as if all the panes had been fastened together by packthread; and the door would not shut close; and all day long, and all night, too—as I found afterwards—there was the moan of the wind through that and the window, even on a quiet day,—so any one may guess what it was likely to be on a stormy one. No doubt there are many worse places in which people sleep comfortably enough; but I confess it did provoke me that no one should have had the sense to move the bed a few inches to the left, where it might have been out of the way of the draught; and this was the first thing I tried to do. But Jenny was in no condition to bear being disturbed even for her own comfort. She was very bad, she said; she didn't know but what she was a-going to die. Daddy (as she called her husband) was gone for the doctor, and she hadn't no one but the little maid to wait upon her; —but for all I could say, she would not have anything, or do anything, or allow anything to be done for her. She would lie there with wind enough to turn a mill rushing upon her down the chimney. When I tried to pull the mattress along myself, she cried out as though I was going to cut off one of her legs; so at last I had nothing to do but to insist upon pinning a shawl across the fire-place to shut out the draught, and leave her till the doctor came.

A comfortable beginning, and a pleasant prospect for Mrs. Weir the next day! But there was all the more reason for exertion; and as soon as I had made up the kitchen fire, and put the tea-kettle on, that I might have a little tea instead of supper, for I knew it would be more comforting, I went over the house to see what kind of state things were in. The drawing-room was habitable enough. It was a pretty little room with a deep, square window, commanding a lovely view of the bay and the whole cliff. In shape it was not so very unlike the drawing-room at Dene; and when the furniture was arranged properly, I thought Mrs. Weir might rather take to it. But the dining-room was dark, and filled with boxes and rubbish; and in the passages, and up the stairs, litter of all kinds was lying about,—just the kind of litter which it was impossible to know what to do with. I hope I was not hard upon Miss Milicent, but I could not help thinking that it was because the last two or three times when furniture and books had been sent over from Dene, Miss Milicent had undertaken to see the boxes unpacked at the cottage, and had taken things out and thrown them down anywhere, instead of arranging them as she went on.

Up-stairs, Mrs. Weir's bed-room was what I should have called pretty and neat; but she would doubtless see fifty things that were wanted. It was a good size, which was the most important point in my eyes, and had a cheerful look-out towards the south-east, and a square window like the drawing-room. There was a dressing-room to it, besides another good-sized room for Miss Milicent, over the dining-room; and a little room which I was to have, and two attics.

I took off my bonnet and shawl, and then I went down-stairs, and called Polly to come and help me clear some of the rubbish from the passage and the stairs. But it was growing dark, and we had scarcely begun our task, when Dale came back from Compton with the Doctor, who looked grave about Jenny, and said she must be well looked after, and he would send her some medicine, and come and see her again the first thing in the morning. I could not leave her without Polly after that, so I sent the child to sit with her, and went on with my work by myself.

I was standing a minute to rest myself, and looking out

of the drawing-room window, trying to make out what it was impossible to see because of the darkness that was coming, when I fancied I heard the front door bell ring. I listened, but not hearing it again, I thought it must have been my mistake; presently, however, I caught the sound of footsteps, and going out into the passage, I saw two persons there, a little gentleman and a stout lady, strangers.

"Is Mrs. Weir at home?" said the gentleman in a meek voice.

"You had better ask for your cousin, my dear," said the lady. "We want to see Miss Weir," she added, not waiting for him to answer. "This is Mr. Temple, and I am Mrs. Temple, and we are just come. You had better go at once and announce us; now, my dear," and she walked past him to go forward to the drawing-room. The gentleman followed.

"Mrs. Weir is not here, Ma'am," I said as soon as the opportunity for speaking was given me.

"Not here!" she stopped short; "very provoking! You should not have brought me, my dear," she added, addressing her husband. "You should have come first to inquire. I told you there was just the chance of not finding them. I am quite exhausted."

The lady threw herself down in the arm-chair, her flounces spreading out, so as to make her three times the size she was naturally. To judge by her brilliant complexion, high colour, and clear sparkling eyes, she was not likely to be overcome by fatigue, but appearances are deceitful. The gentleman, who had been gifted by nature with a very meek countenance, which he had vainly endeavoured to render fierce by the help of a sandy moustache, stood by her submissively. She handed him a little bag, which she carried in her hand, and he took out a scent-bottle, and gave it her, though I don't believe he thought she was going to faint any more than I did.

"I am very sorry there has been any mistake, Sir," I said, "but Mrs. Weir is not expected till to-morrow. I am just come over myself to put things in order for her."

"We can have beds here, I suppose?" said the lady.

"I am afraid, Ma'am," I replied, a little surprised I

must confess at such a bold request, "it could not be without Mrs. Weir's knowledge."

"I thought that being Mrs. Weir's relations, there might have been some accommodation for us," said the gentleman.

"And Mrs. Weir would wish it, I am sure," replied the lady; "in fact we quite reckoned upon it." She spoke angrily, and was evidently not at all inclined to faint now.

"I am very sorry," I replied, "but I could not take it upon myself, without Mrs. Weir's permission; and indeed there is no room properly ready, except just where I am to sleep myself. Mrs. Weir had no notion you were coming, Sir."

"It was a sudden thought," replied the Captain, "but——"

"Young woman," interrupted Mrs. Temple, "you will be sorry for being uncivil to us; your mistress will be much displeased when she hears of it. I am Mrs. Weir's favourite niece. This gentleman is come to transact most important business with her, and he is not accustomed to disrespect, he never puts up with it. You had better at once go and prepare the rooms, and get us some tea, for we have had a very long journey. This is a most out-of-the-way place; I wonder how any one can think of living in it," she added, speaking to her husband.

"I am afraid I could not get tea to suit you, Ma'am," I replied. "I don't know what there is in the house, and you will find everything very comfortable at the hotel, if you will please to go there to-night; and no doubt Mrs. Weir and Miss Milicent will make everything easy to-morrow."

"My dear—what do you—what do you think?" said the Captain.

"That I shall stay where I am," she replied. "The hotel is not to be put up with, it is too full. That room we were shown into was a mere hole."

"You will be much better off there than here, Ma'am," I answered. "There is no one to wait upon you here but myself."

"And I suppose you know how to wait," she answered.

"Not very well, Ma'am. I am not Mrs. Weir's servant.

I only came over for a time to help arrange things for her, and I have much to do to-night; I don't think I could possibly undertake it."

"Extremely uncivil!" exclaimed the lady. "I shall go up stairs and judge of the state of the house for myself."

"If you please, Ma'am," I replied, but I did not offer to show her the way; I was quite confounded by her coolness.

"My dear,"—she beckoned to her husband to follow, and he went after her quite tamely. I heard her stumble over a box at the doorway, and hard work I knew they would have to make their way up-stairs, such a number of things were lying about; but it was all so much the better for me, for it gave me time to think, and whilst they were gone I sat down to consider what was to come next. A very odd business, certainly, it was.

Mrs. Temple's name I had heard often enough, but I had never understood that there was much kindness between her and Mrs. Weir, at least since her marriage, when there had been differences about money matters. What business she had to come troubling for Mrs. Weir just at this time was more than I could guess. Of course I was unwilling to do anything disagreeable, but as to their sleeping in the house that night it was out of the question. Mrs. Temple was so long away that it is my belief she must have gone up to the attics, but down-stairs she came at last.

"The room over this will do very well; you can make up the bed, and we shall not expect to have everything perfect. The dressing-room will be large enough for Mr. Temple when you have moved out the boxes."

"I could not well put you into Mrs. Weir's room, Ma'am, I replied; "it is kept for her; and the boxes, I fear, are too heavy to be moved. I am sorry to be unaccommodating, but if you will please to go to the hotel to-night, Mrs. Weir will be here to make her own arrangements to-morrow. I must ask you to excuse my leaving you now, as I have work to do."

When I had said this, I walked out of the room, for I was not going to discuss the point with her any further.

I heard them talking to each other, the lady's voice becoming louder and louder, as she seemed to be trying to convince her husband of something against his will; I did not go near them, however, but went up to see Jenny and give her her medicine, and then, as she seemed better, Polly and I set to work again by candlelight to clear away the rubbish. At last, when more than a quarter of an hour had gone by, Polly saw them go down the passage and out of the house-door, and so we were rid of them.

I can't say I was comfortable; I did not know how I could have done differently, but I had been quite put out of my usual way. Ever since I could remember, I had been taught to treat persons according to their station, and though I was proud and wilful, yet I had a natural feeling of respect for persons better born and educated than myself. Even when Miss Milicent provoked me to speak out as she sometimes did, it was more that I caught something of her offhand tone before I was aware of it, than that I had the slightest intention of being uncivil; but Mrs. Temple made something rise up in my heart quite unlike any other feeling. It was not for myself I really think. She did not know who I was, and if I had tried to make her understand, I don't suppose I should have succeeded. But, besides the inconvenience of her request, she had claimed as a right what only ought to have been asked as a favour, and this was what I had never been accustomed to. Mrs. Weir used to say to me sometimes in former days, "Never take a liberty with any person, Ursula, and never let any one take a liberty with you; and then you will know how to behave in every position in which it may please God to place you." I am sure she acted upon the advice herself, for all the time I was with her she never forgot that I had my own claims to respect and consideration, in spite of my inferior position.

Polly began asking questions about the visitors, and would have run out into the road after them, to look at them, if I would have allowed her; but I stopped her directly, and told her nothing. We worked on till nearly nine o'clock, and then I thought it was time to send her to bed. Dale had had his supper, and was gone up-stairs; so I had the kitchen to myself, and I stirred up the fire, which had been

let down again very low, and sat down, listening to the howling of the wind, and the dash of the waves upon the shore; and thinking how much I should have to tell Roger when we met again. As a pleasant end to the evening, there was no milk in the house, and no butter—so my hope of a warm, comforting tea came to nothing; but I contented myself with some bread and cheese, and a glass of beer, and after seeing that Jenny had everything she wanted, I went to bed, and being quite tired out, soon fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXIII.

My new acquaintances did not intrude upon me the next morning. I suppose they had had enough of me. Polly said she saw them going down the cliffs to the sea, but that was all I heard of them, and nearly all I thought about them, for there was business enough to take up every moment. Work as hard as I, and Dale, and Polly, and Williams the carpenter, and a girl from the village could, it seemed as though the house never would be straight by the time Mrs. Weir arrived. I was most anxious that it should be, for she was one of those persons with whom first impressions are everything; and if, on coming to the Heath, she was to see the place untidy, I knew well enough she might take a prejudice which nothing would overcome.

Jenny was still quite ill, though the doctor spoke less gravely about her than he did the night before. But it was useless for her to think of moving; and I had all her work to attend to as well as my own. Mrs. Weir was to come to dinner, and a roast chicken was to be provided for her. Dale, and Polly, and I, dined off some cold mutton, without potatoes, and but little leisure we had to eat that.

About four o'clock the fly drove up to the gate. Williams had only time to gather up some of the carpentering tools, and rush out of the drawing-room window, whilst Polly carried away in her lap every scrap of litter she could see, before it was at the front door. My heart beat quite fast. It came over me all at once what a dreary thing the new

home would be to Mrs. Weir; and when the flyman let down the step, and I went forward to give her my arm, I scarcely had courage to look her in the face.

But I had no reason to be afraid. Mrs. Weir was not a person to give way in great trials. She rested her hand upon my arm, but I did not feel it even tremble; and, when she stood upon the ground, the first words she said were, "God is very good, Ursula; He gives us friends to receive us everywhere." I hoped Miss Milicent would have come with her into the drawing room, but she always left her mother to me when I was there, so I took the poor lady in myself. The strangeness of everything did then rather overcome her, and she sat down and cried a little, but they were very quiet tears—not at all like those of a person who considered herself suffering from a great grief. She brightened up after a few minutes, and began admiring the room, and saying how comfortable it was. She was always gracious and thoughtful when people had been working for her. And then I thought of telling her a little about the time it had taken to put everything in order, thinking by that means to distract her thoughts. It was all very awkward and odd; I could not tell what to do next, and I was wishing to be in half-a-dozen places at once. But my work was soon settled, for in walked Miss Milicent, and with her Mr. and Mrs. Temple.

I can't say how cross I felt. Just at the very moment Mrs. Weir wanted to rest and be alone! And Miss Milicent not to know better than to bring them straight into the drawing-room without notice! But it was exactly like her.

"Mother," she said, and she went up to Mrs. Weir, "here is Matilda Temple, and her husband, too. They have been waiting to see you."

Mrs. Weir looked up as though in a dream; she made no answer.

Mr. Temple held back, but his wife urged him on. "I am afraid we have called at an awkward moment," he began.

"Only it was impossible to resist the temptation," interrupted Mrs. Temple. "Being in this part of the world, we felt you would consider it so unkind, my dear aunt, if we passed the house without coming in. And our time is so short,—only till to-morrow,—and there is so much to see,—

such lovely scenery;" and then, putting her head a little to one side, and twisting her mouth, she added, "Besides, it is so sweet to meet the friends one loves."

I watched Mrs. Weir's face all the time Mrs. Temple was speaking, expecting to see something of anger or annoyance in it. But not the least! As gently and sweetly as ever she answered, "I was not quite prepared to see you, Matilda; but Milicent and I will do our best to make you and Stephen welcome."

"We must make ourselves welcome first, mother," said Miss Milicent, bluntly. "Cousin Matilda, I think you and Stephen had better go now, and come again by an by."

"It is a very short peep," said Mrs. Temple.

"Ursula," Mrs. Weir turned to me. "I think I feel rather tired. Matilda, you will excuse me. I am a little ——" Her voice failed her, and she looked extremely pale.

"Faint," said Mrs. Temple; she came forward to push me aside, and support Mrs. Weir's head.

But I kept my place.

"If you will excuse me, Ma'am," I said, "I think Mrs. Weir is most used to me; and, Miss Milicent, if you would be good enough to pour out the sal volatile, and if Mrs. Weir might be left quite alone."

I was obliged to speak plainly, and Mr. Temple took the hint, walked to the door, and looked back, expecting his wife to follow.

"Yes, go, my dear," she said, nodding her head at him, "I shall come presently; she will be better; it is only fatigue—nervousness. I dare say the pleasure of seeing us was a little too much. I shall come presently. Don't wait for me, my dear."

I made sure Miss Milicent would have burst out then. She was not usually so cowed;—but no—she went out of the room, and sent Cotton in, and left her, and Mrs. Temple, and me together.

No doubt it was fortunate for me that we were obliged to think of Mrs. Weir instead of ourselves, or Mrs. Temple and I might not have been such good friends. We had a difficult matter to bring Mrs. Weir round. It was full a quarter of an hour before she recovered enough to speak,

though I don't think she ever quite lost her consciousness. Mrs. Temple was sensible and helpful enough in what she did, but the nonsense she talked was not to be imagined. She seemed to think it was quite fortunate that she happened to be there, and declared several times that she couldn't think how we should have managed without her. "But all things were so Providentially ordered," she said. I don't believe it once entered, her head that she had worried Mrs. Weir by thrusting herself upon her at a wrong time.

At last, when it was a question of taking Mrs. Weir upstairs, I made a stand. Cotton and I knew very well what to do; and Mrs. Temple should not come, I was resolved. I whispered to Mrs. Weir to beg her to go; and the poor lady, in a very feeble voice, thanked her niece as though she had done the most self-denying act possible, and hoped to be better, and see her again in the evening.

I did not think even then that we should have got rid of her; but she twisted her mouth, and said it was a delightful privilege to be permitted to help a friend; and then she kissed Mrs. Weir and departed.

All that evening Mrs. Weir kept her room. Mr. and Mrs. Temple called again, but I urged Miss Milicent to send them down word that her mother was not well enough to see them, and so they were not admitted. And, as they were to go the next day, I pleased myself with thinking we should be left to arrange our own affairs without interruption, and that, if Mr. Temple had business to talk over, he would just spend an hour with Mrs. Weir in the morning, and there would be an end of it. But little I knew of Mrs. Temple.

Mrs. Weir was better the next morning; and a message came over from the hotel to say that Mr. Temple would like to see her if she was able. What passed I don't exactly know. It was not a very long talk, and I don't expect it was one of much consequence, except that Mr. Temple was anxious to put in a claim for some old debt, of a couple of hundred pounds, which, now that the Dene estate was sold, he thought might as well be paid off. A letter to the lawyer would have managed the business just as well, as far as I could ever understand; and, as to Mrs. Temple being a

favourite, Miss Milicent herself told me that her cousin Matilda had been the torment of the family for the last ten years, though her mother had always been willing to think the best of her.

Whilst Mr. Temple was with Miss Milicent, Mrs. Temple insisted upon going up-stairs to sit with Mrs. Weir, and it was no use for me to try and prevent it, as I had to be in the kitchen looking after the cooking, Jenny being still too ill to move or do anything but sit up for about an hour, and there being no one at hand to take her place. I wondered to myself at what time Mrs. Temple and her husband meant to go, and wished I could see a fly drive up to take them away, for I had a misgiving that we should have no peace till they were gone; but just as I had Mrs. Weir's luncheon ready, and was putting it on the tray to be taken up-stairs, down came Cotton from Mrs. Weir's room.

"Well! Miss Grant," she said (I was always called Miss Grant by the servants because of its being more respectful), "What are we to do now? I should like to know how the house is to hold us all."

"What is the matter?" I asked. "Why won't the house hold us all to-day, as well as it did yesterday?"

"We filled it yesterday," she answered; "and when there are two more to be put in, I won't undertake to say where they are to be quartered."

"Two more!" I said, and I felt very uncomfortable.

"Mr. and Mrs. Temple in the back room, and Miss Milicent in the little room, and then what is to become of you, Miss Grant? I would make a stir about it, that I would. I would not submit to be put up in the attic."

"They can't come," I said; "it's nonsense."

"They will come," she answered, "and it's no nonsense."

I did not believe her—I could not; it seemed so monstrous. Mrs. Weir being just come into the house, nothing arranged, and she, herself, ill and in great grief, and having lost so much of her fortune, I thought it impossible than any persons could have the face to accept such an invitation even if it had been made.

As for sleeping in the attic, I did not choose to talk about that with Cotton. If it had been a real benefit to any one,

I would have slept in the kitchen or the scullery. It was not that I cared for, but the notion of having that dreadful woman entirely in the house, never to be free from her; for the moment I did think that I must give up and go off at once to Sandcombe.

"The luncheon will be cold if you don't take it up at once," I said to Cotton, trying not to show that I thought anything of her news.

"Not so cold as somebody's welcome should be, if I had my will," she replied; "but you are very strange, Miss Grant. I don't think you know a bit when you are put upon."

Cotton was wrong; I did know very well, but when persons serve for love their shoulders can bear a tolerably heavy burden.

As we were speaking Miss Milicent came out from the drawing-room, looking feverish and hurried. She sent Cotton away, and then said, "Ursie, what have we got in the house? We must have dinner at six o'clock."

"There are some cutlets and the remains of the chicken, which I was going to fricassee," I said; "I thought, with a bit of bacon and a pudding, that would be enough, Miss Milicent, for you and Mrs. Weir."

"You had better get a leg of lamb, Ursie. Mr. and Mrs. Temple are likely to be here."

"To stay, Ma'am?" I said, for I thought I would have it out with her at once.

"That is as may be," she answered gruffly. "They won't stay for my asking, but my mother is so easily taken over. She has no more power of saying 'No' than a baby. And as for Matilda Temple, she would come over a hyena."

"Then I am sure, Miss Milicent, I am worse than a hyena," I said, and I could not help laughing, vexed though I was. "She would never come over me, you will excuse my saying so."

"Don't boast, Ursie; you have never had to do with her. You see if she is not come to quarter herself upon us for a month, and neither you nor I, nor any one will be able to say her nay."

"But indeed, Miss Milicent," I exclaimed, "it ought

not to be. She will drive Mrs. Weir out of her senses. It is my belief that it was seeing her helped to make the poor lady faint yesterday."

"If she was dying, Matilday Temple would stick by her," exclaimed Miss Milicent; "and talk good all the time, till she thought herself a saint, and made my mother think so too."

"And where are Mr. and Mrs. Temple to sleep, Ma'am?" I asked.

"I shall take to the attic," said Miss Milicent.

"Oh! no indeed," I exclaimed; "that must not be, Miss Milicent. There is my room, quite ready. I will move my things in a minute, and the attic is quite as good as I shall want."

"It won't be, Ursie Grant," she replied, catching hold of my arm, as was her habit; "my mother won't allow it, and, what is more, if she would I would not. When you came to help us in our troubles we promised you a comfortable room, and we aren't going to have it taken from you by any one."

"Only if I give it up, it is not taken from me," I said; "and, indeed, Miss Milicent, it is not fitting; I could not stay here, with you sleeping in the attic, and me in the room below."

She would make no reply, but went off, and I heard her tell Fanny to come and help carry her boxes up-stairs.

It touched me, I confess. I did not believe she had so much thought, but it made me very uncomfortable; for really, as I said, it was unfitting, and I had a kind of fear that it would make mischief.

I took the opportunity of going up-stairs to Mrs. Weir, under pretence of carrying away the luncheon, and, fortunately, I found her by herself. Cotton had persuaded her to get up and dress, and she was sitting by the window.

"I was not prepared to see you there, Ma'am," I said; "I fancied you wouldn't get up till the afternoon."

"I feel better, thank you, Ursula, and lying in bed only weakens me; besides, I have had a visitor."

"I was afraid Mrs. Temple would have been too much for you, Ma'am. Seeing her did you harm yesterday."

"No, Ursula, it only startled me a little. Mrs. Temple is a very good woman, and when she talks to me, she reminds me of many things which I am too apt to forget."

"Indeed, Ma'am," was all I could say.

"She has been very well brought up," continued Mrs. Weir, "and she has done a great deal for her husband. He was very extravagant as a young man, and she has quite cured him, and now he gives all his money to charities. He owes her a great deal."

"And no doubt she takes care to make him pay it," was the uncharitable thought which crossed my mind, but I answered by asking if Mrs. Temple was likely to remain long in the neighbourhood.

"I have persuaded her to stay for three or four days, Ursula. She has never seen this part of the country, and she wishes to do so very much, but she cannot be at the hotel. She cannot bear it; it is noisy, and she is not strong."

"Persons who travel can scarcely expect to meet with the same quietness they have at home," I replied; "but I never heard any complaint of the hotel, Ma'am."

"Mrs. Temple does not complain. She says, very rightly, that the worst accommodation is better than creatures like ourselves deserve. Indeed, she made me ashamed of being so particular myself. I hope you will forgive me, Ursula, if I have ever given you trouble by it. I have been very much spoilt."

I saw a tear glisten in the poor lady's eye, and I ventured to take her hand, and say, "Dear Ma'am, if you will please not talk so, twenty times the trouble would be nothing in return for the goodness and kindness you have shown to me for years."

"Ah! but, Ursula, it is not right to let the mind rest upon these trifles. Mrs. Temple is not fanciful as I am. When I told her that I was afraid the bed in Milicent's room might be hard, she assured me she could sleep upon the ground if needful."

"Perhaps Mr. Temple may be more fidgety, Ma'am," I observed; for I could not help noticing how entirely the good gentleman was put aside, even by Mrs. Weir.

"Ah! Ursula, Mrs. Temple has done so much for her husband in that respect, as well as in many others. She says that he is a changed man since she first knew him. He has no wish for fine carpets and curtains, and soft beds, and sofas. He desires nothing but quietness. That is an excellent influence for a wife to exercise.

Mrs. Weir sighed, and I knew that she was in her heart reproaching herself for having encouraged her husband in extravagance by her own fancifulness.

"They will find the room small, Ma'am," I said; "and I don't quite know what to do about the dressing-room. Fanny and I had thought of filling it with the things we couldn't put elsewhere."

A harassed look came over Mrs. Weir's face; it always did when there was the least fuss about arrangements. Her brow contracted, and there was a heavy darkness across her eyes. I saw it would not do to make more objections.

"You can fill my room, Ursula, if you like. I am not going to be so particular as I have been. What does it signify? I shall soon be out of this world."

"But those who love you, dear Ma'am," I said, "will take care that you shall be comfortable whilst you are in it. Please don't trouble yourself; we shall manage, I dare say; and it won't be for long, I suppose."

"Only for two days, Ursula. Mrs. Temple is obliged to be at home. She is making preparations for a charity bazaar; so she cannot stay. I have promised to look over my things, and see what I can spare for her. I was just thinking, when you came up, that you might, if you would, be kind enough to unpack one of my boxes, and help me to choose."

I am afraid I felt very unwilling; but as I did not venture actually to say "No," I replied that, if I might be allowed, I would rather wait just now, for I had to go to see about dinner.

"Thank you, by and by will do very well; or, perhaps Cotton will bring the box."

Already in my mind I saw Mrs. Temple fingering all the pretty little toys and ornaments in which Mrs. Weir found pleasure; and my heart swelled so that I really could not

answer. But there was no escape. Mrs. Weir's mind, I could see, was possessed with the notion of giving up something she cared for. What that tiresome woman had been saying to her, I was unable to imagine.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Miss Milicent took possession of the attic, in spite of all I could say, and Mr. and Mrs. Temple were put into her room; and, as it seemed, were likely long to remain there. As for going away in two days, I was sure from the beginning what that would come to. If ever there was a woman who might be called a burr, it was Mrs. Temple. Once let her come near you, and, as Miss Milicent said, she would stick to you through everything. You might cast her off one minute, and think you were rid of her, and the next you were sure to find her clinging to you again. When the two days were over, she declared herself to be wonderfully better for the sea air, and Mrs. Weir was very pleased, really so, I do believe; she was pleased at anything which did good. Mrs. Temple was pressed to stay. I remembered the charity bazaar; but if there were really going to be one, there was certainly no hurry in preparing for it. Not but what it was still talked about. Mrs. Temple was always collecting seaweeds out of doors, or cutting up bits of card-board in doors, liking, she said, to employ her time usefully; and I take it for granted it was all useful, for even Miss Milicent was drawn in by her, and made to search for stones and specimens, as Mrs. Temple called them, all which were to go to the charity bazaar.

In a week the house had settled down as though Mrs. Temple had lived there, and meant to live there, always. But it was just the contrary with me; having her there opened my eyes to one thing,—that I was not so necessary to Mrs. Weir as I imagined. It was not a pleasant discovery, but it made me see how selfish I might be, even in what appeared to be my best feelings. What Mrs. Weir wanted was a little sympathy and amusement; and when she could obtain this,

her life was tolerably comfortable; for she was like a child, accustomed to live just for the day, and to trust everything to others. The very weight of the cares and griefs which had burdened her for so many years, I believe, forced her to this. Her husband had made her helpless, and kept her so; and now nothing roused her except some great call of what she considered duty, such as that which had made her dwell so much upon the thought of rejoining Mr. Weir. If that notion were to come up again, I knew she would startle us all by her energy; but now she was sinking down into a kind of life which sometimes made me think of the beautiful sea anemones found upon the shore,—half vegetable and half animal,—moving their long feelers, and searching, as it were, for something, they scarcely knew what; yet contented to remain in one place, and appearing to find a kind of solace in spreading themselves out in the sun, and taking thankfully the light and air which God, in His wonderful Wisdom, had provided for them.

It is happy for us, I am sure, that we do not all need the same comfort. I should never have found mine where Mrs. Weir did, in Mrs. Temple's society; but in saying this, I don't in the least mean that I was, therefore, in any way better or wiser than Mrs. Weir,—quite the contrary. It was the very goodness and simplicity which I never could attain to that made her take for reality what always seemed to me mere outside show. Mrs. Temple showed herself to me the first night I ever saw her; she was off her guard then, and the impression I had of her remained by me. Perhaps, but for that, I too might have been deluded by her. But I don't know; there is something in true kindness and goodness, which I fancy can never be counterfeited. All the fine talking and appearance of sympathy, which Mrs. Weir had such faith in, sounded to me hollow from the beginning; and I could not but see by Mrs. Temple's words and ways that she had one great besetting sin, which, as far as I could discover, she was totally blind to. She was a thoroughly mean woman about money matters. She had not been well, and she wanted change and sea air; that was the history of her visit to Compton Heath; and as days went on, I saw that she had made up her mind from the beginning to come and quarter

herself upon Mrs. Weir, not for one or two nights, but for a month, or six weeks, or any time that might suit her. But she would not have said it for the world. No, all the time it was, that she was so anxious to go, only her aunt pressed her to stay, and seemed to enjoy a little sympathy and affectionate companionship so much, that really, in her distressed state,—a state worse than widowhood,—she could not make up her mind to leave her.

It was all quite true about Mrs. Weir; she did like it, at least in a certain way, and for a time. To me, it was just like having a wet blanket thrown over me to hear Mrs. Temple converse, especially when she touched upon serious subjects. I never knew what to say, or which way to look; and though I could have listened to Mrs. Weir for hours, when she talked to me in her earnest, simple way, I never heard one of Mrs. Temple's set speeches without feeling as though I wished a trap-door could open in the floor, and I might sink down and hide myself. But dear, good Mrs. Weir, took it all in like a sermon. She was so sincere herself that she could not suspect others of make-believe; and constant sorrow, and thinking of serious matters, and living in that strange dreamy way, out of the world, made her prepared at all times for subjects which came to other people with a a shock and a jar.

Miss Milicent and I had a little conversation upon this subject one day. It was after we had been at the Heath about three weeks, and I had received a letter from Roger, saying he had finished his business in London, and was coming down the next week to Sandcombe, and asking if I could go over and see him, if it was only for a few days. As things were, it struck me, that I might just as well make my move once for all. There might never be a better moment; and that afternoon, when Miss Milicent came into the kitchen to give some orders, I determined to propose it to her. I was standing there, showing Cotton how to make Mrs. Weir's coffee,—for Jenny Dale, though she was pretty well again, and able to cook, had never managed to make coffee to please Mrs. Weir.

"I should like to speak to you if you please, Miss Milicent," I said, "if you are not busy."

"Yes, I am busy; I always am," she answered; and true enough it did appear that she ought to be busy, even if she was not, for it would have taken full ten minutes, rightly, to put herself tidy. She had been down upon the shore, getting seaweeds, and crabs, and crawling things, to be placed in a glass, for Mrs. Temple—I suppose for the charity bazaar. Such a mass of mud on her short tucked-up dress, and such boots! and the pockets of her loose jacket stuck full of stones and shells, and her bonnet all awry; if I had not seen her nearly the same every day, for the last fortnight, I don't think I could have kept from a smile.

But I tried to be very respectful, knowing my temptation the other way, and I said, "I wouldn't trouble you if you are really busy, Miss Milicent, but I have had a letter this morning, and I thought I should like to talk to you about it."

"A letter, have you? Oh!"

Miss Milicent's look grew softer. She took a real interest in Roger, and must have guessed the letter was from him; but she still went her own way.

"I want some brown pans, Jenny," she said, "flat pans; and where is the sea-water Dale brought up from the shore? Here are beautiful things to be cared for," and she uncovered a basket and showed a mass of slimy-looking coloured jelly, lying upon stones and seaweeds, with tiny crabs and periwinkles, and all kinds of uncouth creatures, crawling about amongst them.

"They things had best have stayed where they were born, it's my opinion," said Jenny; "they don't look natural-like here. What am I to do with them, Miss Milicent?"

As she spoke, Jenny poked one of them with a skewer, and then started back, declaring "she wouldn't, for the life of her, have anything to do with it. If she might put it in the pot and boil it she wouldn't so much care, but live jelly was what she was not used to."

I brought the pans from the scullery myself, and Miss Milicent and I moved her creatures, as she called them, into it, and then, as they began to unfold in the clear water, Jenny ventured to look in upon them, and, in spite of her declarations, that "they weren't canny, and she couldn't

abide them," we left her standing by the pans and poking them about with the skewer.

All this time Miss Milicent seemed to have no thought for my business, but when her own was finished she said, "Now, Ursie Grant, if you choose to come to the dining room, I can see the letter," and away she walked, expecting me to follow her.

We went into the dining room, and she shut to the door. "Well! what is the mischief?" she began.

"That Roger is coming to Sandcombe, Miss Milicent, and I think it is time for me to be going," I replied.

"You have taken an uppish fit, have you?" she replied. "I thought it would come to this; Mrs. Temple said it yesterday."

"Mrs. Temple!" I exclaimed.

"Yes! she is a sharp woman, though not after my fancy in all things. She said she saw it in you the first night she came; and I have a doubt that you were not too civil to her then, Ursie Grant."

I was upon the point of explaining, but I remembered that evil words multiply by being taken up and cut to pieces, like the creatures Miss Milicent had just brought into the kitchen; so I let Mrs. Temple's unkind remarks pass, and answered, "You would scarcely have said that Miss Milicent, if you had known all that went on. But I don't know what I have done to make you or any one call me uppish. It can't be because I talk of going away, for that has been settled ever since I came."

"I knew how it would be," persisted Miss Milicent, in her old way, carrying on her own words just as though I had not spoken. "Matilda Temple said she was sure you would never go on long, dining in the kitchen with old Dale and his wife, and not having a place to sit in except your bedroom. She was wrong though in one thing, as I told her, for it was my own will to go to the attic."

"Oh! Miss Milicent," I exclaimed, "how can you listen to Mrs. Temple; did I ever complain?"

"No; but you are going away."

"But not for that," I replied, and I felt the angry colour rush to my cheek. "If there is one thing I hate more than

another, it is taking upon oneself to have airs, and being above doing what is kind and helping. I would dine with old Dale and sit in my bedroom from this hour till the day of my death, if it was my duty, and could comfort any one, much more be of use to Mrs. Weir, and you know it, Miss Milicent. You don't really believe Mrs. Temple; if you did, it would be a hard struggle with me to keep from walking out of the house and never entering it again."

"I was wrong, Ursie," she said, and she stretched out her large hand, stained with the marks of the mud and sea-weed she had been handling, and gave me something between a pat and a shake. "But it comes over me, and that's the truth, and if Mr. Temple and Matilda weren't here, I think I should run away."

"I fancied you didn't like their staying," I observed.

"No, I had rather have you than them, any day, but I had rather have them than nobody. Don't you see how quiet my mother has been since Mrs. Temple has taken to being with her?"

"Just for the time," I said; "but Mrs. Weir must see through it some day, Miss Milicent, as you and I do."

"She may, and she mayn't; any how, it helps for the time."

"Oh! Miss Milicent," I exclaimed, "can you bear to see the good lady deceived, and made to rest upon another, when you, her own flesh and blood, that could be everything to her, are close at hand?"

I had never spoken so plainly before, and I was afraid how my words might be taken. Miss Milicent winced a little, but she had a way of turning off from any subject she disliked, and making an excuse by finding fault with some one else. That was how she managed to deceive herself upon this one point, and so I suppose it is with us all.

"My mother is very queer, Ursie," she said, "as you well know, and ever since I can remember she has looked for comfort out of her own family. The doctors say it's health, and I dare say it is; but whether or not, I can't please her, and if she chooses to be taken in by Matilda Temple, why she must be."

"But it will work some harm in the end, for certain," I

said. "You don't trust Mrs. Temple yourself, Miss Milicent."

"Not I, not for a moment; yet she is not such a hypocrite as you think, Ursie. She humbugs herself just as much as she does other people."

That was seeing deeper than I should have given Miss Milicent credit for, and I asked her what she meant.

"Why, just this," she replied; "I have lived a good deal with Matilda Temple, and seen how things went on. She was very badly brought up as a child, left quite to her own ways. She never knew how to be honest and open like others, and she loved nothing but herself. Then her mother died, and she went to live with a kind of cousin, a Mrs. Frere, a good woman—yes, a good woman, if ever there lived one upon earth, but one who was always lecturing and talking of religion. I could not endure her fashion of going on myself, and I ran away from her whenever I saw her, yet I respected her. But with Matilda it was different; she learnt to talk the same as her cousin, and Mrs. Frere thought her an excellent, good child, because she could quote texts, and said she liked to hear sermons, and Matilda thought so herself, and she thinks so now, and nobody has ever told her differently. She has her notion of goodness, and she acts up to it."

"If she had read her Bible, she might have found out that it was not the right notion, I should have thought," was my reply. "To be sure, I have seen but little of her, but her ways do strike me as being shabby."

"Shabby! she is the shabbiest woman, and the proudest in England," said Miss Milicent, "and the cleverest besides. We must all take our dose of religion, Ursie, that we know; but I suppose we like to take it our own way. Matilda Temple wraps up hers in talk, and makes it a good size, and then she swallows it whole, and so it never tastes unpleasant."

I did not answer directly,—I could not. It came over me with such a terrible dread, that we might all be doing the same in some way or other. I could see it in Miss Milicent herself, clear-sighted though she was to Mrs. Temples's short-comings, and there was I, perhaps as great a self-deceiver as either.

Miss Milicent continued, "It is not to be wondered at that Matilda Temple should think much of herself. There's her little husband obeys her like a black slave."

"And it is true, then," I said, "what Mrs. Weir told me, that she had saved him from being extravagant?"

"Oh, yes! saved him from that, and from a great deal else, and made him nearly as shabby as herself; only I must say one thing for him, it goes against the grain."

"Really! Miss Milicent," I exclaimed, "you do surprise me. If you think of your cousins in this way, how can you bear to have them here?"

"Because anything is better than being forced to give in to another person's fancies all day, Ursie Grant. I must have liberty. It is bad enough, anyhow, to be set down in a corner of the world like this, but if I am to sit in doors week after week, and talk twaddle, I shall fall ill. That is the truth."

"Yet there are some hours when Mrs. Weir likes to be alone," I ventured to say.

"May be, but you don't understand; no one can. Parents and children, and brothers and sisters, are not like other people. I dare say you think I am undutiful; I dare say I am."

I must have looked shocked, for I always thought that if I had a mother living, I should feel it such a pleasure and an honour to do everything for her. But Miss Milicent was better than her word, I knew, and I am sure that her conscience reproached her, after she had spoken in this off-hand way, for she went on, "You know, Ursie, there's no one but you that can suit me and my mother also, and it's the plain fact; and if we can have you here, everything will go well, and if we have not, we must have Matilda Temple, or any one we can get, and take the consequences. And who is to answer for them?"

Without waiting for me to reply she went away, seemingly in a huff.

This sudden end to our conversation was like a gust of wind. It took up all my ideas, and turned them round as it were, till I did not know where I was. Just for one moment I thought Miss Milicent was right, and that I was answer-

able for whatever might happen, if Mrs. Temple stayed and I went away; but I soon saw the folly of such an idea. God has only given us one conscience to take care of, and trouble enough it is to keep that clear of offence. If I went my own straightforward way, I was not answerable for the crookedness of other people's. And I saw, too, what Mrs. Kemp had first put into my head, that my staying only blinded Miss Milicent more to her own duties. I sought no more conversation, but went up-stairs to my own room, and wrote a letter to Roger, telling him, that nothing preventing, I would be at Sandcombe, if William and Leah could receive me, that day week.

CHAPTER XXV.

My stay with Mrs. Weir was about to terminate less pleasantly than I had expected. I seemed to have done but little good to her, and less to Miss Milicent, and I knew that I left a snake in the grass behind me in Mrs. Temple. But for Mrs. Kemp's warning, I might have been even more disappointed, but I was learning (very slowly, though, for it was a hard lesson to one of my disposition) to make doing my duty my object, without caring for seeing the fruits. Miss Milicent was surly when she found I was resolved to go. Mrs. Temple, who had scarcely noticed me before, became suddenly very patronising and amiable, and poor Mrs. Weir, to whom I broke the news as gently as I could, cried a good deal, and said if God ever made her rich again, she would send for me, and beg me to come back and live with her; but her mind was for the time finding a new rest, and when the day of my departure drew near, she was consoled by Mrs. Temple's promise of staying with her another fortnight. Her conscience indeed was a little troubled about Mr. Temple, who, she said, must find it so dull to be living there with three ladies; but Mrs. Temple assured her, that solitude and contemplation were his delight, and if it was so, he certainly must have been in Paradise all the time he was at the Heath, for he wandered about on the rocks and by the shore

all day, and never spoke to any one, except I believe to Mr. Perry, the Preventive lieutenant. He was a meek man now, and gifted with much endurance, whatever he might have been formerly. I never heard him say anything in opposition to his wife except, "Perhaps it would be better not, my dear."

On the day fixed William's cart was to be sent for me and my boxes. It was to go into Hove first, and to come back by Compton, so that I was not likely to leave till the evening. All the afternoon, Miss Milicent was in and out of my room, upon some pretence or another, talking about all kinds of things in a rambling way, and often in a very cross tone, especially prophesying that everything would go wrong when I was gone, and as the climax of evil, declaring that neither Jenny Dale nor Cotton would ever know how to make her mother's coffee. When the last box was packed, and just going to be corded, she brought in a beautiful large prayer-book, with a very clear print. "There is no room for it," she said, as she put it down upon the top of my frilled collars.

I took it out and looked at it. She had written in it "Ursula Grant," nothing more.

"Oh! Miss Milicent," I exclaimed, "it is very good of you, and I shall value it so much."

"I have crumpled your frills," she said; "you had better give up wearing frills, Ursie Grant. There will be no time for getting them up at Sandcombe."

"I don't care about the frills," I replied; "but if you would please, Miss Milicent, to put your name in the book too, I should be greatly obliged."

"I have put enough to prevent its being stolen," she said.

I could get nothing more from her. She would put the book into the box herself, hiding it underneath, as though she was ashamed of it; and not allowing me to say another word of thanks.

Fanny came to tell me the cart was ready, and to help me carry down my boxes; but Miss Milicent peeped over the stairs, and told her to go and fetch Dale,—her mother wanted me; and I went to Mrs. Weir.

Mrs. Temple was with her. "A pleasant afternoon you have for your drive, Ursula;" she said, before Mrs. Weir could speak; "I hope you will enjoy it!"

"Thank you, Ma'am," was all my reply; it always made me feel cross when she called me Ursula, though I don't know what other name she could well have given me.

"I had a commission to be executed in Hatton;" she continued, "and I felt sure that you would be glad to attend to it for me. The Compton carpenter charges more than I think right for the little workframe he made for me the other day; and I wished you to see the other man,—I forget his name,—at Hatton, and inquire what he would do the same for; I shall not pay more than he says."

"The frame cost eighteen pence, I believe, Ma'am," I said.

"Yes, and it ought to have been only fifteen. I could have had it made for fifteen at home; but these country people are very exorbitant, and it is not right to encourage them, dear aunt, is it?" and she addressed Mrs. Weir.

"I dare say not, my dear. I generally give what they ask, but then I am not a person of business."

"It was Smithson who made the frame, I think, Ma'am," I said.

"Yes, Smithson I believe was the name."

"He is very poor, and not a very good workman," I continued, "and I think, Ma'am, you had the frame taken back twice."

Mrs. Temple's black eyes flashed as they did the first night I ever saw her.

"Is that Smithson, whose wife had twins last week?" asked Mrs. Weir.

"Yes, Ma'am; and Miss Milicent, if you remember, sent her some gruel. His girl goes to Compton school."

"I remember. Pray, Ursula, take care"—but poor Mrs. Weir stopped short, and I saw a tear in her eye; "you are going away, Ursula, I must not trouble you. Matilda, I should like Milicent to see what the poor woman wants. It must be a great trial to have two babies at a time."

"Certainly, dear aunt. I have no doubt that Milicent will do all that is necessary, if it is a deserving case; but

the man, I should fear, is not honest. However, I will not trouble Ursula Grant to make inquiries for me about him; I forgot that I was speaking to a person who took care to inform me, the first night I saw her, that she was not Mrs. Weir's servant."

There was a little red spot upon Mrs. Weir's cheek, burning and increasing. Her eyes turned uneasily from one to the other; I don't think anything ever so perplexed her as anger. Mrs. Temple rose haughtily; I think she fancied I was going to reply, and that she should put me down; but I merely said to Mrs. Weir, "Dear Ma'am, the cart is come; I think, if you please, I must go."

"Perhaps, Matilda, if you would not mind,—I think I should like to speak to Ursula alone."

Mrs. Temple said not a word, but walked out of the room, like a tragedy queen, I was going to say, only I never saw one, though I have heard people talk of them.

Mrs. Weir held my hands fast in hers, not even trying to speak; but the tears coursing each other down her face.

"I must come over again, and see you very soon, Ma'am," I said.

"Yes, you are not going away far, I desire to remember that. But, Ursula, I won't keep you; do you think you could sit down?" It was one of her little fancies, that she could not bear to see any one standing; it gave her the notion of hurry. I sat down. She pointed to an Indian box on her work-table. "I wished to show you before you went; I have chosen my things for Mrs. Temple's charity. I asked Milicent to look at them, but she said there were enough without them. But I desire to give them, Ursula. God gave them to me, and I should like to give them back to Him."

I brought the box to her, and she unlocked it, took the things out, one by one, and ranged them in order upon the table. They were nearly all foreign, and mostly Indian; and some of them so delicate, that it seemed as though any other fingers than Mrs. Weir's would have been unable to handle them. Particularly I remember a little chess-board of carved ivory, with the tiniest set of chessmen that can be imagined standing upon it. It had been sent her only a few

months before; and she had taken the trouble herself to fasten the little figures upon the board with gum. It used to stand upon the table at Dene, with a glass case over it; but I had not seen it since we came to the cottage.

She looked at her pretty things as a child might have done, when they were all put before her. Just for the moment she seemed to have forgotten that they were to be parted with.

"Perhaps they will not be wanted, Ma'am," I ventured to say; for I felt quite a silly dislike to her giving them away.

"Do you think so, Ursula?" She seemed pained at the notion. "Mrs. Temple says they will make her stall very beautiful."

"I dare say they will, Ma'am," I answered, shortly.

"And it ought not to be a sacrifice to me," she continued. "They are very little things; I do not know why I liked them so much."

It was upon my lips to say that I should not care what was done with them, if they were to go for a good object; but I stopped myself,—God looks at motives, not objects. No doubt in His sight it was a holy offering. I could not take upon myself to cast a doubt into Mrs. Weir's mind, though in my heart I felt that I could have seen the things thrown into the sea, rather than put into Mrs. Temple's hands, to give her the opportunity of making a show without expense.

"And you think they are enough, Ursula?" added Mrs. Weir, simply.

"Quite, Ma'am," I said. "I don't know how Mrs. Temple will contrive to take them."

"And I shall learn to do without them," she continued. "Mrs. Temple has written out a text for me, Ursula, and I have put it in my work-box, that I may remember to try and not care for all which I have cared for. She has made it very pretty; it is illuminated."

I could scarcely help smiling. The poor lady's taste for pretty things was so strong, in spite of all she did to overcome it. Mrs. Temple had written the text upon perforated card-board, and the capital letters were coloured.

The words were, "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out; and having food and raiment, let us be therewith content." I returned the text, merely saying, that I wished we could all remember it; it might save us a great deal of anxiety. It did not strike me till afterwards what a wonderful power God has given to simple earnestness of heart. Mrs. Weir was like the bee, she could only extract honey even from intercourse with a woman like Mrs. Temple.

"And you must go now, Ursula," she said, as I went up to her, after putting the carved box back into its place.

"Yes, dear Ma'am, I think I must. I know my brother would rather the cart should not be kept."

"And you will see Mr. Grant at Sandcombe, I suppose. That will make you happy."

My heart was too full for a reply. Mrs. Weir continued, "I wish you to be happy, Ursula. I pray God to make you so. You have not been able to make me happy, but you have comforted me."

"Not so much as you have comforted me, Ma'am," I said. "You have taught me things which I shall remember all my life."

She clasped her little thin hands together. "God be thanked for it, Ursula. I had a hope once that I should live actively to His glory; but now I can only 'stand and wait.' I should like to ask you to mention my name in your prayers, —only you will have so many to think of."

I caught hold of her hand and kissed it.

"Do you think I could ever forget it, dear Ma'am?" I said. "But I don't like to think I am going away. I shall hope to come and see you very often; and you must always tell me what I can do for you."

"I thank you, Ursula; I know I may depend upon you. But Mrs. Temple says that I have accustomed myself to lean upon you too much."

I believe I gave an angry start. Mrs. Weir did not notice it. "I have a little book," she continued, "which I should wish you to keep for my sake; it is 'Bishop Wilson's Sacra Privata.' Mrs. Temple recommended another, but I was not sure you would like it. I am afraid I vexed her by

choosing this; but you have often read part of it to me, and so I thought it would help you to remember me."

She put into my hands a tiny book, bound in purple morocco, quite plain, except that the edges were gilt. My name was written in it,—"Ursula Grant, from her sincere friend, Margaret Weir,"—and beneath, that text from the First Epistle of St. Peter,—"But the God of all grace, who hath called you unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." The words "after ye have suffered a while" were underlined.

Mrs. Weir pointed to them. "I would not have you without suffering, Ursula," she said. "It is the highway to the peace that passeth understanding. God bless you."

It was all I could do not to break down, but I thanked her in few words and a troubled voice, and left her with a heart full of love; yet fearing, lest with Mrs. Temple by her side, she might one day cease to care for me.

CHAPTER XXVI.

I EXPECTED to meet Roger at Sandcombe, and yet I could think of Mrs. Weir. That was, I suppose, partly because I always had lived so much in the present moment; but it was partly also because I had forced myself of late to turn away from the recollection of Roger, and to think of life for a time without him. If I had done otherwise I should have been too unhappy to attend to my daily duties. The trials of life are, I believe, after all, very much what we choose to make them. It was a kind of instinct with me to take every one as it came, and twist and turn it, till I saw it in the point of view which made it most bearable. I have sometimes fancied that untoward events are like those curious padlocks formed of rings of brass, with separate letters engraven upon them; when the rings are all turned properly, so that the letters form a certain word, the key goes through easily; but till this is done, one may try forever and not be able to unfasten the padlock. Perhaps the word which all

human trials are intended to form is Faith, for by that alone the mysteries of God's Providence are unlocked.

At any rate, I know that I could never go on fretting about anything, however painful; and, when once I had made up my mind that Roger and I were to be parted for a year, I said to myself, "It is God's Will, for some good purpose, to take from me for a while the greatest happiness I have; but He has left me a good many blessings still, and so, instead of grieving over what I can't have, I will make the best of what I have."

I don't mean to say, however, that I could do all this at once. Many and many a struggle did I go through with the yearning for the old times, or the dread of the new ones; and even that afternoon as I drove away from Compton Heath, and drew near to Sandcombe, all the slumbering anxieties and sorrows seemed to rouse themselves up to depress me.

In a future state of existence, it will, no doubt, be very pleasant to go from one star to another, and see what the different inhabitants are like. Where there is no sin there will be no sorrow. But in this evil world, where a sudden change in a home often means only a turning from troubles of one kind to those of another, such a move comes to one with a kind of shock.

The cart drove into the yard, and there I saw Roger and William standing together. I jumped out before the man could help me, and ran up to them.

"What, Ursie? How d'ye do?" said William, good-naturedly. "You are rather late, aren't you?"

Roger kissed me very hard on both cheeks, but said nothing. They went on talking about some alteration in the farm. Leah was gone in the chaise to Hatton, and was not returned; so I went up-stairs to my room, and unpacked my boxes, and put my things away in the drawers. Stupidly enough, I had forgotten that I should not be at Sandcombe in time for tea; and now I should have to wait for supper, unless William thought of offering me anything. I dare say people would call that very strange and silly, and inquire why I did not ask for some tea in my brother's house; and I can give no reason except that anything which put the Sandcombe household out of its regular way of going on was

a trouble. You might ask, and have, but you were certain to be reminded of it afterwards; and if Leah had come home and found me at tea, she would have been sure to say in the course of the evening that something or another was left undone, because Martha had been obliged to get Ursie's tea; and this, though I had put on the kettle, and cut the bread and butter for myself.

Putting my things away took a long time; after that I thought I would sit down and read a chapter in the Bible, which would make me feel more homelike and natural than anything else; but I had no time, for Roger knocked at my door, and, of course, I was only too glad to bid him come in, and hear all he had to say.

He was in excellent spirits, seeing everything so hopefully, that he made me hopeful too. Mr. Richardson's friend had smoothed the way for him, and his good character had gone before him. He had received an offer which would make all easy. It was proposed to him to accompany a gentleman, named Pierce, who was going out to Canada on his own account; he was to stay with him for six months at least, and help him in his first setting off, and thus he would have time to look about him, and decide as to whether he should finally settle in the country. This plan satisfied William, because it did not require such an outlay of money at the present time, and Roger was quite willing to take things quietly, and not be an independent man all at once; he had managed the greater part of his business, and the little that remained was to be done by John Hervey, who was forced to go up to London the next week. The ship was to sail in about a fortnight's time. For myself I confess the idea that his plans were only settled for six months was a great relief. At the end of that time something might happen to bring him back,—who knew? At any rate the definite time was a limit beyond which I felt I was not permitted to look.

We talked on so long about Canada that I did not think of putting in a word about Mrs. Weir, but Roger was very unlike most people in one respect. Instead of conversing as so many do only about what interests themselves, and because others listen and appear interested, fancying they have been very kind and agreeable, and never asking a question or giv-

ing a thought in return, Roger gave what he took, and because I liked to hear what he had been doing, he liked to hear what I had been doing.

"Now, Trot," he said, when there was a pause, "you have had my say, let me have yours. How has the world gone with you?"

"Pretty well," I said, "but I don't think, Roger, the world misses me much. Mrs. Weir has taken up with her niece, and so she could well spare me."

"If it's Mrs. Temple you mean," he replied, "Mrs. Weir won't be friends with her long; at least, if what John Hervey says is true."

"Mrs. Weir is easily imposed upon," I said, "and Mrs. Temple can talk good, and I can't. Besides she is a lady, and her relation; only I should like to think that all the things I am sure will be said of me behind my back would not be believed."

"You will be in Canada with me, Trot, soon, and then we shan't either of us care what any one says of us."

I knew that I should care. If I were to go to Canada, or to the other side of the globe, and to feel certain of never setting foot in England again, I should care. But Roger's thought just then was that Canada was a cure for all evils.

"I am thankful you are staying here, Ursie," he continued; "it is best to be with relations. After all, they are more to be depended on, and William talks very kindly about you."

"Yes," I said, "but perhaps it is more safe to reckon upon myself for comfort than upon William or any one. That is not wrong, I hope, Roger."

He looked grave. "It now and then strikes me, Ursie, that you have something to learn in this world," he said. "But so we all have for that matter. And you are a brave girl."

"You mean, I trust to myself," I said; "but whom have I else to trust to, Roger? Putting aside religion, I mean."

"No, you will make your way anyhow."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Nothing, Trot, nothing. That's Leah's voice, isn't it? and whom has she with her?"

I knew, for I had seen the chaise drive up with Leah and Jessie Lee.

Roger opened the door and listened. "She has brought back little Jessie," he said, thoughtfully. "I was going to say something to you about her. I'm glad she is come."

"It is more than I am," I replied, "I wanted to have you all to myself, and now I must go and talk to her."

Roger and I went out into the passage together.

Leah and Jessie were talking at the foot of the stairs, and the next minute Jessie's light step was heard as she ran up two stairs at a time. She pushed against Roger, by an accident, when she reached the top, and stumbled. When she saw him she burst into one of her pretty, merry laughs. "Oh! Mr. Roger," she said, "you frightened me. I thought you were a giant."

"I never meant to frighten you," he said, "but you are so giddy, Jessie. You run without thinking where you are going."

"Very likely," she replied, "I know it is always my own fault, whatever happens. But, Mr. Roger," and she looked up at him with a pleasant smile, "what business have you here?"

"Ursie!" called out Leah, several times, from the foot of the stairs. Her voice sounded to me like the croaking of a raven; it quite drowned what Roger was saying.

"I am here," I said; "do you want me?"

"Oh! I was coming up; but I'm so tired. Just let Jessie put her bonnet and shawl in your room, will you? Have you settled yourself? Supper's nearly ready."

I was heartily glad to hear it, for I was very hungry. "You will go down and speak to Leah, won't you?" said Roger; and he stood rather aside for me to pass.

I did not feel in the least inclined, but I saw he wished it, so I just kissed Jessie and told her to go into my room, and down-stairs I went.

"I was sorry to be out when you came, Ursie," said Leah, as she threw aside a handsome silk cloak, which she always wrapped round her when she went in the chaise, "but I was obliged to see about our new washerwoman; I don't want to be washing more than once in six weeks, now you are come, and I can put things in better order."

"Oh!" I replied. I don't know how it was, but I felt so unwilling to be mixed up as one with Leah in her household concerns.

"Jessie is to sleep here to-night," said Leah. "I told her I was sure she could have part of your bed, if the spare attic wasn't ready, and I don't think it is; and, besides, it is not worth while to have the bed in the attic made up just for one night."

"Supper, my good woman! Supper!" William came out of the parlour and clapped Leah on the shoulder.

She gathered up her cloak. "Ursie, if you don't mind, you can just take this up-stairs. I shall go and see about supper."

"And come down directly," said William to me; "don't stay gossiping with Jessie. I am as hungry as a hunter."

Up-stairs I went again. Jessie had not moved from her place, nor Roger from his. Jessie looked ashamed of herself. I thought they must have touched upon some serious matter, for I heard Jessie say, "I can't be always working and thinking like Ursie, Mr. Roger, to please any one." She spoke a little pettishly, and not quite so simply as was her wont. Roger had a very kind smile upon his face. He always seemed to look upon Jessie as a spoilt child, and he said, "You know, Jessie, it is not for me to find fault, only I disliked to hear it said, and so, as I was going away for so long, I thought I would e'en tell you myself."

Jessie looked so put out as she followed me into my room that I could not help asking her what was the matter. She avoided answering at first. "It was nothing," she said; "people were very cross; they had no right to say such things, and Mr. Roger was very unkind to believe them."

"Then there is something," I replied. "You had better tell me, Jessie, and if Roger is wrong, I can put him right."

"It was not half as bad as he declared," she exclaimed; "the girls in Hove do much worse, and that he knows, and you know too."

"I don't know," I said, "for you have not told me what you did."

"Miss Shaw and Captain Price were there," continued Jessie, tossing her head pettishly; "and if they saw nothing

wrong, I don't see what business other folks have to find fault."

"But what is it? what is it?" I felt provoked with her, though I tried not to show it.

"It is Mr. John Hervey's tale, I am certain," exclaimed Jessie. "He is always spying."

"Really, Jessie," I replied, "I can't stand here all night in this senseless way; if you really don't choose to explain, I must needs leave you and go down to supper."

Jessie was very much inclined to cry, but when she saw that, instead of attending to her, I was going towards the door, she pulled me back; "Miss Shaw and Captain Price were in the shop," she said, and the two officers were their friends, and I only talked and laughed a little. Miss Shaw talked a great deal the loudest."

"The old complaint!" I said, rather shortly. "Jane Shaw will make herself noticed wherever she goes, and if you will go about with her, Jessie, you must expect the same. Was that all Roger had to say?"

"He told me that Mrs. Deer, the stationer's wife, had talked to him about it, and said that if I didn't take care I should get myself a bad name. But Mrs. Deer is envious of Jane Shaw, that I know. Jane told me so herself. Hetty Deer was at the race ball, and Captain Price danced with her, and so Mrs. Deer thought there was a chance for her, and now she is disappointed."

"That may or mayn't be, Jessie," I replied. "One thing is quite clear, that Roger has heard your name mentioned in a way he doesn't like, and being an old friend, he did quite right to tell you of it, and if you will take my advice, you will give heed to the warning, and not go into Hove again with Jane Shaw, or any of her set. You know, Jessie, because you are left so much to yourself, there is the more reason for you to be careful."

Jessie's little fit of temper was over when she had given it vent. She still held my gown and said, "Don't go, Ursie; I am very unhappy, and Mr. Roger thinks so ill of me."

"No, indeed!" I exclaimed. "It is not in Roger's way to think ill of any person, much less of one he has known like you, Jessie, from a baby. But no doubt he is very particular as to the ways of those he is interested in, and that

may make him speak out more strongly than seems quite kind."

"I do mean to be careful," sobbed Jessie; "you know, Ursie, I never go on in that fashion when I am with you; and I want to be steady, indeed I do; and I only went to Hove with Miss Shaw because she begged so hard, and I thought it was the only chance I might have of seeing about a dress for the wedding."

"If you girls don't come down to supper, there will be none for you," cried out William from the passage below. Jessie washed her face, and dried her eyes, and went to the glass to smooth her hair, staying longer than I thought necessary; so I left her there, and went down alone.

Roger just looked up from his plate, when I entered, and not seeing Jessie, ate his supper in silence. I could discover from his troubled face that it had cost him a good deal to say what might have seemed an unkind word to the poor little motherless thing, but she quite needed it.

I forget exactly what passed at supper-time. I know it was a great effort to me to talk to Leah, and that Roger scarcely spoke, and Jessie looked as shy as a frightened bird. We were not any of us natural, but we did not understand each other, and so how could we be natural?

There was never much time between supper and going to bed, but I longed to have Roger alone, and find out what was really the matter about Jessie; and it happened that I had the opportunity, for Leah took advantage of having Jessie there to send the maid to bed early, and she and Jessie carried away the supper things, and then staid some time talking in the kitchen, and William went away too; and so Roger and I were left to ourselves.

Roger entered upon the subject directly; "Jessie told you what I said to her, Trot," he began.

"Yes; she told me in her way, which is no way, at least as far as understanding goes. I could make neither head nor tail of it. Why didn't you speak to me first, Roger?"

He laughed. "Put a woman to scold a woman! you would know better than that, Ursie, if you were a man."

"But what was the mischief?" I asked.

"No mischief," he answered, with a flash in his eye, as though he were angry with the word. "But Hove people are

not very careful of what they say, and Jessie doesn't think. Mrs. Deer heard a great noise, laughing and talking, in Hale's shop. Jane Shaw, and Captain Price, and a party of officers, were there having luncheon. Jessie was there too. Mrs. Deer said she made more noise than any, and that people stopped as they went by to listen, and that some one had heard one of the officers call her Jessie, and that she laughed and seemed to like it. I don't believe that; but any how it was not what I liked to hear; and it's no use saying anything to old Mrs. Morris, and less talking to Leah, and so I thought that perhaps Jessie wouldn't take it amiss from an old friend, if I gave her a word of warning myself. You know, Ursie, I am going away, and not likely to see her again. But I dare say I was wrong, women don't like being talked to."

"Whether they like it or not they must bear it, if they need it," I replied. "But I don't think, Roger, you were quite the person to speak."

"Likely enough; but—" he stopped a moment, "it was so on my mind, it came out almost before I was aware, and now, I suppose, she won't forgive or forget."

"Don't fear that," I said; "she is only a silly child, and quite accustomed to be scolded."

He shut up suddenly; all his answer was, "Well! it can't be helped," and then he took a candle to go to bed.

I had felt cross when Leah first proposed that Jessie should sleep in my room. It was taking things for granted in a way I did not like; but, as it happened, I was glad of it afterwards, for it gave me the opportunity of a little more talk with Jessie. There is no time like night for a free conversation. Jessie and I said little to each other as we were undressing, but when the candle was out I took courage, and told her what had passed between me and Roger, and how he was afraid she was angry and would not forgive; but, I added, that for my part, I could not see what cause he had to ask for forgiveness. I felt he had acted like a true friend, though, perhaps, he might have been a little sudden in his way of introducing the subject; and then I went on to give her some more cautions for the future, telling her how specially needful it was for girls, left as we were, never to give occasion for an unkind word. "Roger would stand by you,

Jessie," I said, "through thick and thin, and so would I; but you won't find many to do it, especially amongst the persons whose company you think so much of now."

She caught up my words quickly, and answered that she knew I had a bad opinion of the Shaws; but I knew nothing of them, and no one had ever been able to find any real harm in them.

"As to real harm," I replied, "it would be dreadful indeed if things were to come to that pass. But that is looking at matters only as men and women look at them. There may be many things that we count trifles, which yet are real harm in the sight of God."

"You have lived so much with set-up ladies and grand people," said Jessie, "that you are over particular, Ursie. How can a merry girl like me be expected to sail about stiffly, and never speak above a whisper?"

"You turn off so, Jessie," I replied, "but you know quite well what I mean. It is not the laughing and talking in proper places, and with proper people, that any one finds fault with. But Captain Price's gay friends are not your friends; they are not in your station, and there is the danger. When people are all equal they can have little friendly jokes, and no harm may come of it. But what would be very kind in Roger, or William, or John Hervey, would be a liberty in one of Captain Price's idle set; and, Jessie, Mrs. Weir once said to me, and I wish to my heart you could remember it, that the mere fact of being a woman gives one a claim to respect; that it is a kind of natural rank which even the beggar-girl in the street possesses, as long as she conducts herself modestly and decently; and she told me that the least freedom of manner from a person above my own position, let him be a gentleman or nobleman, or prince even, would be a disrespect which I ought never to allow."

"I can't help allowing it," said Jessie. "They laugh, and say droll things, and then I can't help laughing in return."

"Which shows that it would be much better for you not to mix with them," I said.

"But I don't see," persisted Jessie. "There is Jane Shaw, she is not above you or me, naturally, but she has

been a good deal with Captain Price, and now she is going to marry him. Where is the harm?"

"Captain Price is no real gentleman, Jessie; you must own that," I replied. "Put him by the side of Mr. Stewart, of Hatton, and you see the difference directly."

"But he was born a gentleman!"

"That may be; but his habits and ways are not those of a gentleman, nor of an honest farmer either. He is not looked up to by any one, and that is the reason, so far as I can see, why he is going to marry a woman like Jane Shaw, who is much in the same plight. If Captain Price had respected her, he would have known well enough that he had no chance with her. An offer from such a man is no honour, but the contrary. And as to being intimate with him or his friends, why there is not one of Captain Price's set that I would ever speak to again if he called me by my Christian name; and I have heard, Jessie, that you only laugh and look pleased."

She was silent, and turned away from me, and I heard she was sobbing. Presently she said, "Did Mr. Roger tell you that?"

"He told me he had heard it, but he didn't believe it."

"It was true," said Jessie; "I didn't think about it at the time."

"But you will think about it now," I said. "Jessie, why do you call, Roger, Mr. Roger? You have known him a pretty long time."

She quite started up. "I could not call him anything else, he is so good."

"You respect him," I said; "and so you can't take liberties with him. What respect could Captain Price's friend feel for you, Jessie, when, having only seen you a few times before, he ventured to speak to you more freely than you speak to Roger, whom you have known all your life?"

She threw her arms round me, and kissed me, and thanked me, and I felt how impossible it was not to love her; and then she begged me to tell Roger that she was dreadfully sorry, and it never should happen again; only would he please not say anything more about it to her. And again turning from me she fell asleep as quickly as a child.

CHAPTER XXVII.

I AM going to hurry over the parting with Roger. I seem to have been telling of nothing but partings lately, and moreover, to speak strictly, there was no parting. At the time I felt this bitterly, but on looking back I see that it was all for the best, and that I was saved a great deal. The fortnight before Roger went was a very unsettled one for us all; so much so, that at last, though every moment with him was indescribably precious, I began to wish that it was all over. Leah I knew was impatient; indeed she did not attempt to conceal it. Everything was put aside to be done when Roger was gone, for William and he had so much to talk about and arrange, that there was no time to be given to anything else. Then there were perpetual interruptions from visitors; Farmer Kemp, and John Hervey, and Mr. Shaw, and Mr. Richardson, and even Mr. Stewart, of Hatton, coming over to Sandcombe upon business or from kindness. It was strange to find what an interest every one took in Roger. I had not the least notion before, how much he was respected; but I don't think there is anything that makes its way amongst country people like steady work and honesty. It is better, even for this world, than great success, which is thought so much of in town and manufacturing districts. I did feel proud of Roger, as I watched him, with his fine, manly face, and straightforward, yet respectful manner, standing talking to Mr. Stewart, and giving his opinions like a man who knows that his words are of value, because they come from a true heart, and a single eye, and a reverence for the laws of God and man. I heard Mr. Stewart say one day to William, that he never knew before what they were all going to lose in Roger, and he couldn't help wishing that something had been thought of to keep him in England. But it was too late; time went on faster than I could well bear to think, and at last there came the day before what I thought was to be the last parting. I scarcely saw Roger that morning, for he went over to Hatton to say good-bye to Mrs. Morris and Jessie. He and Jessie were excellent

friends again,—all the more so for the little breeze. Nothing had been said about it by either of them, but the few times that Jessie came to Sandcombe whilst Roger was there, I remarked that he talked more to her than he had ever done, whilst she on her part seemed to lean to his opinion in all matters.

It sometimes seemed to me a pity, that he should be going away, just when he was gaining an influence over her for good; and yet I knew that it was little enough he could do for her. A girl of her age could not be guided by a man of Roger's age. If any one could do her real good, it would be myself. I thought of this still more when Roger came back from Hatton. He had dined there, and was going then to Longside; and he might, he said, be obliged to drive into Hove; but he hoped not, as it would take up so much time. He had walked to Hatton, but intended to ride to Longside; and while his horse was being saddled, he made me come out with him into the garden; and we walked up and down, and had a long conversation, and all the time about Jessie, for she weighed a good deal upon my mind. He said that she had come out more in this last meeting; I suppose the fact of his going away made her feel quite at ease. She had told him that there was no one to look after her; and that she longed to have some person to cling to, who might guard her.

"She did not ask you to take her with you to Canada, did she?" I said laughing.

He drew back his arm from from me, as though I had struck him with a dagger. "I don't like those jokes, Ursie," he said. "If you will only keep Jessie from the Shaws, she will soon find a good husband without going to Canada to look for one." He was quite silent for some moments after that; and I was vexed, though I had spoken innocently enough, knowing it was all nonsense. He said a little more about William and Leah, and bade me stay with them under all trials. "You are too young, Ursie," he said, "to cut the cable and set sail by yourself. Trust to me, and if God should be pleased to give me health and strength, we will have a home together again before many months are over; and if not"—he stopped short in his walk, and laid his hand upon

my shoulder—"Trot, little one, we must put relations first, because God puts them first. God will help you whatever comes."

Those seem to me the last words I heard him speak; for they are the last which rested in my mind. He rode off to Longside, and on his way met John Hervey, who took him on to Hove. Things were to be done there which he found would keep him till very late at night; and he was obliged to be up very early the next morning, to be in time for the London coach. Farmer Kemp came over to tell us this, and brought a hasty note from Roger, saying that he and John had settled that they must sleep in Hove; and to beg that all he had left might be sent in the very first thing in the morning. Roger's hand shook, I am sure, when he wrote that note; and there was just at the end, "Cheer up and trust; God bless you;" that was all. He had not a moment to spare, Farmer Kemp said. I remember I stood quite still in the middle of the room, and did not speak a word, till Farmer Kemp came up to me and whispered, "Courage, lassie;" and then quite quietly, for I could not bear to let any one see what I felt, I answered, "The things are very nearly ready; I will go and see about them;" and up-stairs I went.

Not one tear did I shed till I found myself in bed at twelve o'clock. It took me till then before all was ready; and oh! how I longed all the time for a kind word and look. But William was vexed that Roger had not thought of the plan before; and Leah was sadly put out because I was obliged to keep the maid up when she would not help me herself; so they neither of them gave me much comfort. So lonely, so very lonely I felt, when I lay down in my bed,—no words can describe it. I had a short night, scarcely to be called rest, and was up at half-past four again, to finish the last box. At half-past five I watched the cart drive out of the yard; and then I went back to my room again, and instead of crying, I knelt down and said all my troubles out to God, and that made me better.

The day after Roger went I thought of going over to see Mrs. Weir. It must have looked unkind not to have done so before, but it was impossible. I was afraid Mrs. Weir

would not understand this. People who are at leisure so little know what the difficulties of busy people are. Even now it was not very easy to find time for the walk; for I had a dress to make for Mrs. Richardson, which had been put aside for Roger's work; and I had no means of gaining any extra hours, as Leah was inclined to seize upon every moment to which she had the slightest claim, and indeed, upon some on which she had no claim. I had foreseen this from the beginning, and resolved to have, if possible, a clear understanding with her about it. I took the opportunity, when William was smoking his pipe after dinner, and she was dawdling about, before setting to work for the afternoon.

"Leah," I said, "I thought of walking over to the Heath this afternoon; and perhaps I might have a cup of tea there; so you needn't wait for me."

"It is early days to be going, isn't it?" she said; "and I thought you wanted to sit quiet in the afternoon, and do your work."

"I should be back by half-past six," I said, "and I might work between that and supper, and besides at odd times to-morrow, and so make up. Mrs. Weir will think it strange if I don't go."

"There is house needlework to be done between tea and supper," replied Leah; "and, as to odd times, I don't see where they are to come from."

"I might manage half-an-hour before breakfast, perhaps," I said.

Leah looked black. "You will scarcely do needlework, and get breakfast, too," she said.

"I was not thinking of helping to get breakfast," I answered. "I thought, Leah, you always did that yourself."

"I have done it since Jessie went," she replied; "but I can't go on with it. There are so many things to be seen to at night, I must have more rest in the morning. And as for Martha, it is useless to look to her; she has to light the fires, and boil the milk for the men. There is the dairy, too. I reckoned upon you looking after that, Ursie. Some one must have an eye to it early; and then Martha can clean the milk-pans, and put it in order, whilst we are having our breakfasts."

All very true; only the breakfast was Leah's own duty.

"Don't you see?" inquired Leah.

"Yes, I see," was my reply. "But, Leah, if I take to all this in the morning, you must please spare me an hour to make up in the evening. I don't mean when there is a press, but generally."

"We can see; we'll talk about that," she replied. "It's best to go on gradually. No one can mark out a day as you would have it done, Ursie."

"And I suppose you would like to have the poultry fed the first thing after breakfast," I said. "Jessie used to do that, I know."

"I don't care about the poultry," she replied, "I have taken to them myself, and I think it is better. But there's the meat in the larder to be changed, and you could help Martha clean the dishes; and then, there is the cooking."

"I am not a good hand at cooking for so many," I said; "I suppose I shall have the girl to help?"

"That is as may be. We shall see if she is wanted. After all, there's not so much to be done. Bacon and cabbage are easily boiled for the men, and the maids eat after us."

"You give the men fresh meat sometimes in the week, don't you?" I asked.

"Well! we used. But I find they do just as well without it. And these aren't times when we can afford to have fancies. William is rather particular about his own dinners, Ursie; and I dare say, having been so much with Mrs. Mason, you have learnt some things that may please him."

"You will want a pudding, I suppose, for the men?" I said.

"Why, yes, to be sure;—it saves bacon. Apples are coming in, but they are scarce this year, and I would have them kept for William. Anything does for the men. They eat suet pudding as often as not; and baked rice and milk, with a sprinkling of sugar,—not eggs, of course. By the bye, Ursie, the day after to-morrow is baking-day, and then William looks to having some fruit tarts made; and he complained last week that there weren't sweet cakes enough. He is like a child in being fond of sweet things."

"The cooking and baking both will be more, I am afraid, than I shall be able to undertake, Leah," I said, "considering that I have needlework of my own to do besides."

"It is only one day in the week," she replied, "and Jessie always took the greatest part upon herself."

"Because she had nothing else to do," I replied. "What I can put into the morning, I will; but I would not have you look to me for more than that, please; for, indeed, I don't think I shall be able to manage it."

"We shall see; we can't settle beforehand; only I thought, Ursie, you were come to make yourself useful."

I did not know what to answer, being sure that, whatever I said, she would take my words as a kind of promise.

"And there's washing too," she continued, in an under tone.

"And help for that," I said, boldly.

"Yes,—some." Leah spoke doubtfully. "Mrs. Hobson won't come, since Kitty has been turned away, and the Hatton woman, whom I've engaged, won't be enough."

"But there are Martha and the girl," I said.

"Yes, but if they are washing, who is to take their work?"

"Really, Leah," I said, "if you mean that I am to do it, I don't see how it is possible. There will be cooking on washing-days, just as on any another, in the morning, and a great deal more fuss in the house. If you help yourself, or have some one else to help, we may do very well; but all the willing horses in England won't be able to draw a waggon if it is loaded too heavily."

"It will only come once in six weeks," she said, "I have made up my mind to that."

"And the work will be all the more heavy," I replied. "If you would have it once a month, and get proper help, Leah, I am sure you would find it better."

"I think, Ursie, you had best leave me to manage my own affairs," was the reply I had from her; and she went off without giving me any more definite notion of my work, or any better idea of how it was all to be managed.

It was not hopeful certainly. My thoughts turned back to Roger and my happy home at Dene, with no one to interfere with me; all my duties regular and orderly, and Roger always pleased with me. I did not see how I could get on as things were; but still less did I see how God, by these little trials, was teaching and training me.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

For I had great faults. They are clear to me now. At that time I almost thought they were virtues. Left so early as I was without a mother to search minutely into the defects of my natural character, perhaps it is not surprising that they were hidden from me; although I can with truth say, that, in the main, my heart's desire was to serve God and do my duty conscientiously.

Wilful and hasty I had no doubt that I was; I had been punished for these faults continually, and Roger had again and again corrected me for them. Some people, too, said I was self-trusting and conceited, but my conscience, on a surface examination, in a measure, acquitted me. If persons were set over me whom I respected, I could obey, and be glad to do so. I knew this, and it satisfied me, and I looked no deeper. I did not see that there was at the bottom of my heart a love of rule and independence, even underneath my apparent submission. I could not give up my own will, merely because it was ordered by God's providence that I should do so. I dearly loved to feel myself my own mistress, and wherever I was placed, I was inclined to criticise and find fault with any person who claimed authority over me; and all this did not appear to me wrong. I had but one desire—that things should be done in the right way. I forgot that it was necessary also that they should be done by the right person.

And so again as regarded independence of character, the wish to provide for myself, and make my own way in the world. These were dispositions in which I saw no harm and suspected no danger. They had worked well hitherto. They had, I knew, been a great assistance to Roger, and very much lessened his anxiety in parting with me. They had given me a position in Mrs. Weir's household, and enabled me to be of far greater use to her than I could have been if I had merely done as I was told, without offering an opinion, or showing that I was able to work out my own path. I could not help feeling that I had gained a standing for my-

self in the world, even beyond my age, and it seemed to me that I had nothing to do but to go on as I had begun, and all must be well. For several years past, day by day, insensibly to myself, my self-dependence had increased. If I had continued with Mrs. Weir, gaining influence over her and her household, it must have gone on increasing, and who can say what the end might have been.

We are often warned against our besetting sin. I am not at all sure whether we do not need a much stronger warning against our besetting characteristic. One thing I am sure of, that the inconsistencies and weaknesses which I have marked in some of the best persons I have ever known, have arisen from some tendency in the natural disposition, in itself innocent, but which altered the right balance of the character. Too much hope, or too little, too great excitability, too great rapidity in forming opinions, too great fear of giving pain, too much caution; many such peculiarities there are, which are no doubt necessary as forming the particular features of every individual character, and yet which require in each case especially to be watched and guarded against.

In my own case I knew that I had a great love of independence; when it became wilfulness I was scolded and punished for it. Yet it was only because it was wilfulness; no one would have thought of punishing me for liking independence. It would have been very unjust and unfair to do so; but then no one thought of whispering in my ear:—"Take care that your love of independence does not become a fault by blinding your eyes to duty."

It may be said that religion ought to have set all that right, and so no doubt it ought; but how few become thoroughly religious at once. We may think ourselves converted because we have gone through a certain state of sorrow and repentance, and no doubt such feelings are very often the beginning of a holy life, but they are by no means the end. Religion must, I imagine, be with us all a matter of growth; and as to myself, I do not remember that I ever had any of those seasons of excited feelings which I know that many pass through. Times there were indeed when I was more penitent, or more earnest, or thankful, but it was

all in a quiet way—Roger's way—in which there was very little talking about feelings.

In some respects I dare say this was a snare to me, for there are dangers wherever one turns. I was likely to go to sleep over my duties, or do them in a slovenly manner, and this would naturally hide from me many of the lesser evils of my character. It is only when we are heartily zealous in our wish to please God, that we search deeply into the secret corners of our hearts, and through His grace are enabled to discover and root out the weaknesses and infirmities as well as the secret sins which lie hidden there. My life had hitherto been too peaceful to reveal to me the necessity of such an examination. Where there was little contradiction there was little to struggle against, and though by no means well satisfied with myself, I certainly had much to learn as to my own deficiencies. And at that time religion with me was more a matter of duty than of love. I can now see, through God's mercy, that duty is but a stepping-stone, one without which we can never reach the point at which we should aim, but which cannot by itself raise us to the height from which Heaven will be always in our view. Sorrow and disappointment in this world had their work to do in me before I could be brought to feel that the religion for which God has created us is not merely a law of obedience but a spring of happiness,—happiness in the consciousness of that deep, satisfying grateful love which makes the heaviest trial and the most self-denying discipline a joy, when submitted to for Christ's sake.

I say this of myself, because I feel that to many my feelings of religion, at the time of which I am writing, may appear unsatisfactory. They were so, I grant. They were unfolding, but as yet they were only in the bud. All I will venture to say of them is, that I believe they were of the right kind. There was a deep perception of my own unworthiness, a hearty wish to serve God, a watchfulness against all the faults of which I was aware, a spirit of thankfulness for my daily blessings, and I hope some perception of the infinite love shown to us all in our Redemption. I speak of this latter feeling doubtfully, because it seems to me now that it is one which persons are often slow in attain-

ing, especially when, as in my case, the growth of religion has been unaccompanied by great fears or an overpowering sense of sin, and consequent relief in the consciousness of pardon. If I can judge at all of myself, I see my own sinfulness now much more fully than I did then, and so I hope I am more penitent and more thankful; and yet I can scarcely say that I am more in earnest.

I walked over to the Heath in a very unhappy state of mind: lonely,—I could not be otherwise, when I thought of the long separation from Roger,—and fretted and perplexed as to my present duties; how far I was bound to give in to Leah in consideration of her being William's wife, and that he was giving me a home; and how far I was called upon to stand up for my own right, and the agreement which had been made as to my time before Roger went away. But as I drew near the Heath, other thoughts forced themselves upon me. I met Mr. Temple as I was going along the side of St. Anne's Hill. He was coming up from the cottage, and had moved a hurdle which was in his way, and as I drew near he kept it open for me. He was a civil little gentleman, and I liked as well as pitied him, so I thanked him very heartily.

"You are going down to the cottage, I suppose," he said.

"Yes, Sir," I replied. "I hope I shall find Mrs. Weir pretty well."

"I have not seen her to-day," he said. "There have been visitors, and she has not been down-stairs."

"More visitors!" I thought to myself. "They will kill poor Mrs. Weir between them soon."

"A little pleasant society does her good, I think," continued Mr. Temple. "She has been much better since my wife and I came."

"She is getting over her trouble a little, I hope, Sir," I said, for I did not like to agree with him, though there was some truth in his words.

"I think, if we could find a house to suit us, we might remain here some time longer," observed Mr. Temple. He looked at me askance; he never seemed to have courage to look any one in the face. I made no reply, and he went on,

"The climate suits Mrs. Temple so well, and we were just thinking of giving up our house in the north. Do you know how many bed-rooms there are in that house on the lower road—'Stonecliff,' I think they call it?"

"No, Sir, I don't," I replied, and I made a movement to go on; but Mr. Temple was determined to have his talk out. I believe he always kept what he had to say till he found some one to expend it upon, when he was out of his wife's sight.

"Mr. Richardson says it is cold in the winter," he observed; "did you ever hear that it was considered so? You must know this part of the country well, for you have lived here all your life."

"The houses at Compton are all new, Sir," I answered; "I don't know much about them; but it must be very cold for a delicate person like Mrs. Temple. The wind cuts round the corner of the cliff, and she would find the roar of the sea troublesome."

"I don't think she minds that," he said; "it is a good house, I believe, and—but, however, I won't keep you; if you see Mrs. Temple, tell her I have walked over to Dene."

I suspect a fit of caution and fear of his wife came over him at the moment, and stopped his communicativeness, for he rushed away, not waiting to put the hurdle back, and I watched him climbing the hill by the help of his walking-stick, and then continued my walk.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A THORN had been planted in my mind, a very large one, though not so large as it might have been if I had been living with Mrs. Weir. I only half believed what Mr. Temple said, for he was a very blundering man, and Mrs. Temple was just as likely as not to have put the notion into his head, only for the sake of employing him. She was always planning something for him, and as soon as it was settled undoing it again. But if there were any truth in it, it would be ill news indeed, as far as I was concerned; and even as regarded

Mrs. Weir, I had a great dislike to the notion of her being taken in by any one, even though it made her happy for the time. I have always so dearly loved the truth in all things, and would rather know it and face it both in persons and circumstances, however unpleasant it may be, than live in the pleasantest dream that could be granted me. But I don't think this was quite Mrs. Weir's case; a little dreaminess and imagination were necessary to her.

Before I reached the house, I saw the visitors who had been mentioned; they were Mr. and Mrs. Richardson, and they, and Mrs. Temple, and Miss Milicent were standing together in the sweep. I think Mr. and Mrs. Richardson were just going after paying their visit. I tried to make my way to the back door without being noticed, but Mr. Richardson saw and came after me to inquire for Roger, and then Miss Milicent followed.

"So it's you, at last, Ursie," she said. "I made sure you had quite forgotten us; and there has been my mother fidgeting to see you every day. You knocked down one of the little ivory chessmen when you took out those nick-nack follies the other day."

"Did I, Miss Milicent?" I exclaimed, very much surprised and vexed, and not at all recollecting at the moment on what occasion I had meddled with them.

"And Matilda Temple was to have had them for the charity bazaar, but they are no good now," continued Miss Milicent. "Not that I care much for that," she added, laughing, and speaking to Mr. Richardson. "Charity bazaars are not much in my way. Are they in yours?"

He looked grave, and said he did not mind having things made privately and sold for charity, because many persons could give work and time who could not give money; but he did dislike turning what was called charity into an amusement, and having tents, and music, and young ladies to sell the things at absurd prices, and in fact making it just as much a worldly entertainment as a ball or a play. It was as much as to say that people would not give their money without having a return. There was a verse in the Bible which always came to his mind when he heard of bazaars.

He paused a moment, and when Miss Milicent insisted

upon hearing it, he quoted David's speech to Araunah the Jebusite: "Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing."

Mrs. Temple came up just as Mr. Richardson was speaking, and I was afraid there would be a long discussion. I felt a little awkward and out of my place, but I did not like to move away, not knowing where exactly to go. I was relieved when Mrs. Richardson joined us, and interrupted the conversation by addressing me. I think she felt, like myself, that an argument with Mrs. Temple might be disagreeable.

"Ursula," she said, "I am really glad to see you. I think you may help Miss Weir and me in something we have been planning."

"Oh! yes, Ursie can help better than any one," said Miss Milicent; "and she will take a girl at Sandcombe, I am sure. I think, Mrs. Richardson, we might as well let her have Esther Smithson; she is the most troublesome girl in the school."

"I should be very happy to assist in any good work," began Mrs. Temple, coming forward, and rather pushing herself before me.

"Thank you," said Mrs. Richardson: "but this is a business which only concerns parishioners. Happily, Sandcombe is in Compton parish, so that Ursula still belongs to us."

"Your dear mother will be wanting me, Milicent, I am afraid," said Mrs. Temple, in a whining voice, which she always adopted when speaking of Mrs. Weir. "Mrs. Richardson, I am afraid I must leave you."

She was very short in her manner, and I saw she was displeased. I don't know whether Mrs. Richardson remarked it, but I am sure we all breathed more freely when she was gone.

"Could you walk down the road with us a little way, Ursula?" said Mr. Richardson. "I am afraid we must be going, for I have an engagement at home in half an hour."

"Ursula will be tired," remarked Mrs. Richardson, who never forgot to be thoughtful.

If I had been tired I should have gone with them, they

were always so pleasant and kind; but, as it happened, I really was not tired, the air on the hill had been so refreshing.

Miss Milicent followed without being asked.

"What we were talking of, Ursula," said Mrs. Richardson, "was the school."

"The Sunday-school, Ma'am?" I inquired. "I am afraid I should scarcely be able to walk over from Sandcombe as I used to do from Dene."

"Not the Sunday-school, Ursie," interrupted Miss Milicent, before Mrs. Richardson could answer, "but the day-school. We have a plan for the girls. We mean to make good servants of them. They are not to be such good-for-nothings as Kitty Hobson and her set."

Poor Kitty Hobson! She had become quite a proverb of wickedness; yet Mrs. Kemp thought well of her.

Mrs. Richardson never interrupted Miss Milicent, which was one reason, I think, of her being such a favourite. She even waited a second to hear if there was anything more coming, and then she said, "It is only an experiment, Ursula; but you know how badly some of our girls have turned out lately; and Mr. Richardson and I have been thinking whether it would be possible to give them a little domestic teaching before they quite leave school. If we could manage it, we might send them out from the school, with a good character, and put them at once in respectable situations, instead of leaving them to chance places."

"You could take one very well at Sandcombe, Ursie," said Miss Milicent; "you must tell your brother about it. And Jenny Dale shall have one too. Any girl who comes under her will have a fair notion of cooking. I think it a first-rate notion. If Jenny won't teach her, I will undertake it myself."

I tried not to smile at the notion of Miss Milicent's teaching cookery; and speaking to Mrs. Richardson, I asked her to explain a little more clearly what she meant, for I could not see my way to it. Mr. Richardson answered: "I think we all agree that there is a great evil in the present state of things, Ursula," he said; "perhaps a lady can see more into it than a gentleman; but it strikes me that the reason why

so many of our girls come to misery is that they are left to make their first start in the world by themselves. They leave school, and have learned to read, and write, and do needle-work, but they know nothing of household work; and so they can seldom or never go at once into superior service, but are sent to lodging-houses, and farms; no offence, Ursula, but you will agree with me that ordinary farm service is not good training for a girl."

"Very bad," I said, earnestly, for it had often and often weighed upon my mind.

"Now we think," continued Mrs. Richardson, taking up the sentence where her husband had left it, "that if a few persons in the parish, who are interested in the girls, would agree to assist us, we might do something towards remedying this evil. Our notion is that the girls, as they grow old enough, should be sent to some house,—say Mrs. Weir's or ours, or Mrs. Kemp's, at Longside, to work in the morning, from seven or eight till twelve; having their breakfast, but not their dinner, and going to school in the afternoon."

"That is the part I don't like," interrupted Miss Milicent. "Poor starved creatures! why aren't they to have their dinner?"

"Because if they do," said Mr. Richardson, "they become an expense, and persons won't choose to burden themselves with them. I would not even insist upon the breakfast. If they went before eight they should have it, and if not they should get what they could at home. You must remember they are not worse off than they would be if they were regularly at school, and our object is to plan something which shall last, because it only touches time, and not money. You and I, Miss Weir, might be very willing to give the poor children a dinner every day, but Mrs. Burton, the surgeon's widow, would never be able to afford it, and so she would never come into our plan."

"And those who can afford it are to let the children starve for the sake of those who can't," exclaimed Miss Milicent "There is neither rhyme nor reason in that, Mr. Richardson."

"No rhyme, I grant, but I hope some reason," he replied. "If we, who can afford it, give the children a dinner, we

make the others discontented. There must be one rule for all."

"Besides," continued Mrs. Richardson, "there is an exception for Saturday. You may keep your girl all day, on Saturday, Miss Weir, and give her sixpence besides, only you are not obliged to do so if you don't like it."

"And you may want her services on some other day, for the afternoon," said Mr. Richardson, "and then, if you ask permission, it will be given, and you can bestow another sixpence; so you see there is an opening for as much extravagance as you like. Only remember that you must let her go home by daylight, or you will have the schoolmistress, and the clergyman, and the committee down upon you, and be in our black books for ever after."

"Well! it's a capital plan," exclaimed Miss Milicent; "it will be the making of the girls. I should like to see it begin with that lanky-haired Hetty Smithson. If it answered with her it would for any one."

"Ursula says nothing," observed Mrs. Richardson.

"I dare say you know all there is to be said, better than I do, Ma'am," I replied.

"But you have objections," remarked Mr. Richardson, rather in a disappointed tone.

"I think it might answer very well, Sir, if you were always sure of the persons whom the girls would be placed under. It is not the mistresses, but the servants, who will stand in the way."

"Yes," said Mr. Richardson, "I have thought of that."

"If you have good upper servants, whom the girls will obey," I continued, "it will all be easy; but if they are young and flighty, they will only teach the girls evil, and if they are cross they will aggravate them, so that they will never get on together."

"A difficulty, not an objection," said Mr. Richardson. "If the plan is tried in six cases and answers only in three, the three are a gain. Nothing can be worse than the way things are managed at present."

That was true, certainly. I myself had watched Compton girls, sent out into the world, one after another, taking

the first place they could meet with, let it be what it might, and often even working in the fields, because they had no opening for service, and, in more cases than I could bear to remember, the end had been grievous. Still I was not very hopeful as to the present scheme. There was distance to be considered, and I mentioned this to Mr. Richardson.

He had thought of it, he said, and no doubt it frequently might stand in the way. The plan would be much more easily carried out in a town, or in a small place where the houses were close together, than in a scattered parish like Compton. "But where there's a will there's a way, Ursula," he added, with a pleasant smile. "We want three or four persons who will set their heads and their hearts to work, and consider what is good for the girls, and not what is pleasant to themselves. Then I think the difficulty might be greatly obviated. The children who lived nearest to you would go to you, and those who lived nearest to me would come to me. I think, Miss Milicent, upon that principle, Mrs. Kemp would take Hetty Smithson, unless she can be sent to Sandcombe.

"Mrs. Kemp likes good-for-nothing girls," exclaimed Miss Milicent; "she has turned Kitty Hobson out quite new."

"By a little kindness and care," said Mrs. Richardson. "That was what first put this idea into our minds. Kitty was seized just at the right moment, and taught that she had a character, which was a fact she had been made to doubt; and now she thinks it worth while to try and keep it. We want to do the same thing for our girls, before they have reached poor Kitty's 'ne'er-do-weel' state."

"To retain being much more easy than to attain," said Mr. Richardson; and then he added, very earnestly, "There is the analogy of God's dealings with man, to teach us that truth. 'Members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of Heaven,' as the Catechism says; we have our rank given us from the beginning, and all our struggle thenceforward must be to keep it."

My mind all this time was dwelling upon Leah and Sandcombe. I did not at all see how the plan was to work there.

Miss Milicent was rather cross because I said so little. "I wish, Ursie Grant," she remarked, "that you would speak out. I am sure Mr. Richardson would like it better, and I know I should."

"I can understand Ursula's feelings," said Mrs. Rawlinson; "she is taken by surprise."

"Yes, Ma'am," I said; "and I doubt whether at Sandcombe we have any one who could look after a child properly."

"Not yourself?" said Mr. Richardson.

"I am not mistress, Sir," was my reply; and he quite understood, without asking more questions.

"Well!" he said, after a little thought, "let us make up our minds that it will be a failure,—a failure, at least, so far as that many of the children will fail to obtain good from it, and that the persons whom we depend upon to help us will grow weary and give up. Still, is that any reason for not making the attempt? What harm can it do?"

"None," said Mrs. Rawlinson.

"And," he continued, "we will try to hold out a reward for good behaviour. The school is not rich; but I think we could afford half a sovereign, if not more, to any girl who, having gone out to work in the morning, whilst at school, should afterwards be placed in a permanent situation, and remain in it with a good character for a year. That would, I hope, be a little inducement to the parents to keep their children at school longer; and, I confess, one of my main hopes of good is in the fact that the girls, even whilst they are learning to be servants, will still feel that they are children, and under school discipline. Besides the afternoon lessons, there will be the Sunday-school and church for them regularly, so that their good habits will be kept up."

"Well, Ursie, isn't it all right now?" exclaimed Miss Milicent, appealing to me.

But Mr. Richardson answered for me. "Pardon me, Miss Weir; we won't have Ursula's assent drawn from her unwillingly. We will try the plan, and then she shall say what she thinks of it. All we will ask, Ursula, is that you should mention the notion to Mrs. Grant, at Sandcombe, and try to persuade her to let us send a girl to her."

There was no fear of a refusal. Leah would like any help she could get when there was no eating and drinking in the case; and I said at once, heartily, that I was sure there would be no difficulty. I confess I felt very glad not to have to give an opinion as to whether the scheme would succeed. I had always a quick eye for difficulties; and I thought, moreover, that ladies and gentlemen could not well understand the ins and outs of farm-houses.

The principle on which Mr. Richardson acted was beyond me then. He said something to his wife just before we parted, which, though it rested in my mind, it required a long experience to understand.

"These are no days for waiting for perfect plans," he said. "Evils are crowding upon us so fast, that we must seize the first weapon which offers itself to withstand them, so that it is one which we can use conscientiously; and we must be contented to fight feebly—to strike at hazard—often uselessly; yet always with zeal, hope, and faith, remembering that the battle is not ours, but the Lord's."

Note.—The plan alluded to has been tried successfully in different places, with modifications according to the wants and peculiarities of the neighbourhood.

CHAPTER XXX.

"You will find my mother in her room, Ursie," said Miss Milicent; and she walked on with Mrs. Richardson, whilst I went back to the cottage alone, pondering in my own mind upon the strange way we human beings have of looking at our duties; and how Miss Milicent could throw her whole heart and soul into a plan for making Esther Smithson a good respectable girl, and yet could not put herself out of her way for an hour to cheer her poor sick mother. I hope I did not forget that I was liable to the same kind of delusion myself.

Jenny Dale kept me talking for a few minutes in the kitchen, before I could go up-stairs. She was full of complaints, and I could almost fancy that things were worse,

because I was not there. Mrs. Temple, she said, was becoming so domineering, there was no bearing her. She had actually taken to ordering dinner, and came out into the kitchen every morning, and would peer about in the larder to see after the scraps. She was very fond of having scrap dinners for the kitchen, and did not approve of having the bits given away; and this had nearly caused a downright quarrel between her and Jenny; for Jenny had been told by Miss Milicent to keep the bits, and give them to the poor people who were down in Mr. Richardson's list. Miss Milicent had interfered, and been angry; but I suppose she did not see that she had no one to thank for the storms but herself. I told Jenny plainly that I thought she ought not to give in to Mrs. Temple, but go to Miss Milicent at once, whenever such things were done, and she promised me she would; but she was a weak kind of woman, and I could not reckon much upon her words. Then she complained of Fanny, who was made much of by Mrs. Temple, because she waited upon her. Fanny was always a little inclined to be set up, and Mrs. Temple had turned her into a kind of lady's maid, for she and Cotton had quarrelled, and Cotton would do nothing for her. Fanny dressed Mrs. Temple in the morning, and was learning to do her hair, and Mrs. Temple talked to her all the time; and Fanny, it seemed, was beginning to think herself a great person. Oh, dear, the mischief that one tiresome woman may do in a house!

I did not say half nor a quarter of what I thought about it all, but I went up-stairs to Mrs. Weir in no very pleasant humour. The ill-feeling vanished directly I saw her. She was by herself, which was a great relief, and looking so sweet and kind—but thin, and I fancied rather harassed.

"I heard you were here half an hour ago, Ursula," she said, as I went up to her sofa, "and I have been hoping you would come up to me; but my niece said you were gone back part of the way to the Parsonage, and I have no doubt that was pleasant for you."

"Mr. Richardson wished to speak to me, Ma'am," I said; "that was the reason I went. I hoped you had not been told I was come. I know you don't like waiting."

"I am afraid, Ursula, I do not like many things. I

have wished to see you often since you went away; but you have not been able, I suppose, to take so long a walk."

I was just a little chilled by her manner, and answered, "I have not stirred beyond the farm, Ma'am, except to go to church on Sundays. My brother's going and the settling in a new place have taken up all my time."

"Very likely, Ursula; but you promised; I should not have thought so much about it else."

The tone was a little—a very little—impatient; but the poor, dear lady was on the watch, and a smile came over her face directly after, and she held out her hand to me, and said, "If we did not like persons, Ursula, we should not care how long they stayed away from us. Will you sit down and tell me about your brother?"

And I did sit down, and told her everything I could think of; making it as well as I could into a kind of story, for that was what she liked. She was no great talker, indeed, talking soon tired her; but she enjoyed listening, and even when I was a little girl I was in the habit of describing minutely what I did and said, yet with great exactness, for she was very quick and particular, and always stopped me when she thought I was in the least exaggerating. She used to say to me that the habit of exaggeration is a leak in a person's character, through which truth, and therefore confidence, escape unnoticed. This may seem rather contrary to what I said before of her liking to live in a dream, but it is not so really. There is a great difference between inventing facts and arranging them. Mrs. Weir had a special power of the latter kind, and I think being with her had helped me a little in the same way, for it certainly was not in me by nature. Her eye turned to what was bright and beautiful in everything—mine, I am afraid, was inclined rather to the reverse. If we had both looked upwards on a summer day, her gaze would have rested upon the blue sky, mine would have dwelt upon the clouds.

It did me good to talk about Roger and my new life in this way; it was rather like reading a book, and took off the hard edge from my troubles. For a short time I was so carried away that I could have imagined myself back again at Dene; but there was an end to the enjoyment very soon.

The door happened to be open. I heard in the passage the kind of sweeping rustle which always accompanied Mrs. Temple's movements, and Mrs. Weir's attention was immediately withdrawn from me, and she said, a little nervously, "I think, Ursula, you had better explain to my niece why you were not able to come and see me before. She thought that it seemed unkind, but I was sure that it was not."

Explain to Mrs. Temple! Why should I? My proud temper was up at the very notion. When she came in I would willingly have left the room, but she waved her hand graciously, and said, "Sit down, Ursula, don't let me disturb you. My dear aunt, I have brought you your medicine."

"It is a tonic, Ursula," said Mrs. Weir, looking at me. "My niece has persuaded me to try it, and I think it does me a great deal of good."

"I hope it may, Ma'am," I said; though I could scarcely find it in my heart to be pleased with any remedy proposed by Mrs. Temple.

Mrs. Weir smiled as she used to when I was a child, and she wanted to put good thoughts into my head. "I *pray* that it may, Ursula," she said; "and I have not had the neuralgic pain so violently since I have tried it, so I have great reason to be thankful."

Mrs. Temple chimed in with a sentence of the same kind; yet what I listened to with pleasure and profit when spoken by Mrs. Weir, was utterly distasteful to me when uttered by her niece. Doubtless it was the sense of effort and a want of reality. Mrs. Weir's words were natural, Mrs. Temple's forced. From Mrs. Weir indeed I could bear anything. She seemed always to understand how and when to introduce religion. She never jarred upon me by dragging it in at a wrong moment; and I was then much more sensitive upon that point than I am now. Young people with the hopes and joys of this life before them shrink from the sudden mention of subjects connected with Death and Eternity; but when the thought of Death rises with us in the morning, and lies down with us at night, and Eternity is the long day on which we feel that we have even now entered, there is no moment at which a reference to them can find us unprepared.

Mrs. Weir, in her simple way, took her niece's words as

being spoken in all earnestness, but she was not disposed to say much; indeed, I could not help perceiving that she was less at ease with me now than before we were interrupted. Mrs. Temple, who never thought it possible for her to interrupt any one, sat herself down opposite to us, as though determined to listen to what we were saying. I was resolved not to seem awed by her, so I went on with something I had been telling Mrs. Weir about Roger, but Mrs. Temple scarcely let me finish my sentence before she broke in with—

"My dear aunt, forgive me for reminding you, but have you spoken to Ursula about the chess-board? The circumstance requires to be cleared up."

Mrs. Weir's pale face was tinged with pink; the nearest approach to excitement which ever betrayed itself. "It is of no consequence, Matilda; I would rather nothing should be said about it."

"But it is right, my dear aunt; excuse me, but such mysteries ought to be investigated."

"Do you mean, Ma'am, about the broken chess-man?" I replied.

"Yes; you see, aunt, she knows it;" and Mrs. Temple was put quite off her guard, and spoke hurriedly. "We have reason to complain, Ursula, that it was not mentioned before. It was due to Mrs. Weir that it should have been, and it has interfered with her excellent intentions; the little toy is quite useless now, and it might have been turned to excellent account."

"But it does not signify, Ursula," said Mrs. Weir, gently; "only if you had told me that the chess-man was broken I should have have been less sorry."

"Really, Ma'am," I exclaimed, and I stood up, and I have no doubt looked very angry, "I don't understand you."

Mrs. Temple's voice sank to the softest tone, as she answered, for her aunt, "Restrain yourself, Ursula. Recollect that agitation may do harm."

"I do not care about it, Ursula," said Mrs. Weir, her voice shaking, and her hand trembling. "I had no wish to mention the subject; indeed I do not care. I cannot bear to vex you." She took hold of my hand and looked at me quite beseechingly.

"Dear Ma'am," I said, "you can't vex me. I could bear anything from you; but, if you please, I will go into another room and have my say with Mrs. Temple, for I must know what she thinks, and what you think too."

"There is no occasion for any such explanation," replied Mrs. Temple; "we only wish to warn you, Ursula, as you are setting out in life by yourself, that openness and straightforwardness will gain you more friends than the contrary line of conduct."

"But you were in haste when you left me," said Mrs. Weir, "and you were unhappy; I have no doubt that you did not remember it, Ursula; if you please we will think no more about it."

By this time I was so indignant that the very strength of my feelings forced me to try and put a restraint upon them. "I have not been told yet, Ma'am," I said, "what I have been accused of; I imagine Mrs. Temple means to say that I was like a naughty child, and, having broken the chess-man, did not like to mention it. I may have broken it, I won't say that I did not. I am afraid I have not the knack of handling such delicate things properly, but I had no idea of having done it."

"Only you knew what we meant the moment the subject was brought forward," said Mrs. Temple, and she looked at Mrs. Weir triumphantly.

Was it in human nature to bear such an aggravation quietly? I know it was not in mine; and it was in no gentle tone that I answered, "If you would have the goodness, Ma'am, to inquire before you make charges, you would be more likely to be correct. Miss Milicent mentioned that the chess-man was broken, and that was the first I heard of it. If you please, Ma'am," I added, speaking to Mrs. Weir, "I will come and see you again another day, for I am sure you are quite tired now, and I am very sorry I have been the cause of it."

I could not help saying this, for Mrs. Weir was looking so ill from nervousness and vexation that she quite fidgeted me. Mrs. Temple suggested that she would be the better for a little more of the medicine, and made me pour it out whilst she gave it. She made no answer herself to anything

I had said, but treated me coldly and haughtily, whilst Mrs. Weir, whose voice was quite faint, could only manage to say in broken sentences: "I have no doubt it is right. Ursula, if you will come again soon, I shall be better, I dare say. I hope you will hear from Mr. Grant; you will please to let me know when you do."

Explanation and conversation were out of the question in such a state of things, and as for staying to help Mrs. Weir, it was simply useless. Mrs. Temple had stepped into all her ways, and the poor lady turned to her as naturally as she used to do to me. I stood by her side a few minutes, and was asked to fetch a shawl, but I was not allowed to put it over her. Evidently I had no further business with her. Mrs. Temple said, in a very pointed way: "My aunt has had too much agitation, Ursula; she needs perfect rest," and all I could do was to wish Mrs. Weir good-bye, without saying another word.

I found Miss Milicent waiting for me at the foot of the stairs: — "Come here, Ursie," she said; and she opened the dining-room door. "I want to speak to you; you have no need to be in a hurry, I told Jenny Dale to get you a cup of tea before you went back."

"It is very good of you, Miss Milicent," I replied, "but if you please I had rather go." Instead of entering the dining-room I drew back.

"That's perverse of you, Ursie; I have a great deal to say to you, and you must stay. What have you paid such a short visit for?"

"Mrs. Weir was tired," I replied; "and I think, Miss Milicent, that having Mrs. Temple and me together was too much for her."

"Oh! that is the matter, is it?" she exclaimed; "I was sure by your face something had gone wrong; but, Ursie, I told you how it would be if you went away, so you have no one to thank but yourself."

"And Mrs. Temple," I could not help adding. "Indeed, Miss Milicent, I cant believe that anything would be wrong if she was away."

"Come in; why will you stand talking in the passage?" She seized my dress and actually forced me to enter, shut-

ting the door behind her. "Now sit down, and hear what I have to say, Ursie Grant; it is all your doing, and, what is more, worse things will come. She is rooted here; she never would have been that if you had remained. You would have made the house too hot to hold her."

I did not think that much of a compliment, I confess, but, before I could reply, Miss Milicent continued: "She has been working at my mother ever since you went away, putting things into her head; and my mother, as you know well enough, always takes what is given her without asking questions; so Matilda has had it all her own way. No use for me to say anything, even if I had time, and I have been very busy. Mr. Temple has been finding out new creatures for my glass, and he and I have been down on the shore a good deal; and twice a week there is a class of ploughboys and such like, who come to me to learn to write and cipher; and all that, to say nothing of putting the house to rights, has taken up more time than I can say. So you see there has been no one to interfere with Matilda Temple, and the end is that she has bewitched my mother, who can't get on without her. Then the servants have all been at sixes and sevens. Cotton and Matilda Temple have quarrelled, and Jenny Dale threatens to leave, and what is to become of us all I don't know, for Fanny, poor silly thing, says she can't do the work she used because she wants time to read Mrs. Temple's books. If it was not for the girl from the school who is to come now, we might just stand still altogether."

I did not see what Miss Milicent meant by standing still; I always had a notion that there was no standing still in this life,—that it was always going on, in some form or other; the difference being only whether you drove yourself, or let others drive you.

But Miss Milicent continued, and my ideas became clearer. "It's a great trouble, all this, Ursie, and if you were here, as I said before, it wouldn't have happened. But there is a new notion come up, which Matilda Temple thinks is to set everything right, and I should just like to know your opinion about it."

"For Mrs. Temple to go and live at Stonecliff?" I said.

"Now, who told you that? How things do get about! But it is not that exactly. She is wild to go there herself, but she and her husband can't go alone because of the expense; and she wants us to join housekeeping, and share the rent between us."

"Live together!" I exclaimed, in a tone of amazement. "Oh, Miss Milicent!"

"I knew what you would say," she replied, in a disappointed tone. "I told her that I was sure any one who knew the ways of the house,—and I mentioned you particularly,—would decide that it couldn't be. But she took the high hand then, and said she didn't know why we were to trouble ourselves with the opinions of this person or that; what we chose to do ourselves was the question."

"Mrs. Temple was right there, Miss Milicent," I replied. "It could not be of consequence what I, or any one in my position, might say, though, of course, we are at liberty to form an opinion for ourselves; and I can't but think you would do better if you never mentioned my name to Mrs. Temple."

"She can't abide you, Ursie Grant, and that's a fact," said Miss Milicent, thrusting her hands into the pockets of her jacket; "I don't know what you have done to spite her."

"Let her see that I don't like her, I suppose, Miss Milicent," I replied; "there can't be a greater offence than that for any one."

Miss Milicent laughed. "Matilda might hate me, too, if it was only that," she said; "but, anyhow, we are neither of us in her good books just now, for I kept back in giving an opinion about this new plan, and I said I should talk it over with you, just because you knew my mother so much better than any one else."

Those blundering ways! Miss Milicent could have done nothing worse, either for herself or me.

"If you will excuse my saying so," I replied, "I think, Miss Milicent, you made a mistake there. As for this new plan, you really must be the judge yourself. I don't know how the money matters would answer, and I can't pretend to say whether Mrs. Weir would like it."

"There is no doubt of that," she replied; "my mother is like a child in giving up, and certainly Matilda does know how to manage her. She has got her to dress an hour earlier since you went away; and yesterday my mother actually went for a drive for the first time since we came here. I should never have thought of the plan for a moment, if I had not felt that it would be lonely for her when the Temples were gone."

"Then the money question is the only difficulty," I said. "Perhaps, Miss Milicent, your lawyer could help you about that better than I can."

"You have a twist, Ursie Grant; you don't like the plan, and you won't say it out like an honest woman."

"I have no objection to saying it out," I replied. "I don't like the plan, Miss Milicent; but my liking or disliking has nothing to do with it."

It had, though; more than I could at the moment see. Miss Milicent's conscience was uneasy, and she wanted support. She felt that she was putting ease for the present before what would be good in the long run; that is what many of us do.

"And why don't you like it?" she inquired.

"I beg your pardon if I have to speak plainly," I replied; "but, Miss Milicent, I don't think that mixing two families together ever answers, unless it is so ordered by God that it cannot be helped; and then His blessing goes with it, and makes things smooth."

"We shouldn't quarrel," said Miss Milicent; "we have not quarrelled now. I should keep house, and Matilda Temple would look after my mother."

I smiled. This reversing of duties reminded me of what had passed in my own mind when I disliked going to Sandcombe. I could not help saying, "That sounds very much, Miss Milicent, as though you were Mr. Temple's wife, and Mrs. Temple was Mrs. Weir's daughter."

"It might have been better if it had been so," she said; "not that I could have married a little man like Mr. Temple; he is too meek; but we get on very well together."

"They are on a visit," I replied. "People on a visit and people at home are very different."

"It would give me time to help Mrs. Richardson," continued Miss Milicent; "and if Matilda Temple had a larger house, she could have a friend or two occasionally to see her, and that would help to amuse my mother."

Or rather, as I could not help saying to myself, save Miss Milicent the trouble of doing it. The whole scheme seemed to me so silly, that I had scarcely patience to talk of it. I was silent for a few seconds, and, indeed, looked towards the door, as though I intended to go.

"Speak out!" exclaimed Miss Milicent; "I know you have a good opinion of your own judgment, Ursie Grant."

"No, indeed, Miss Milicent," I answered; "I have had too much experience of it lately to have a good opinion of it. I could not say that the plan is a wrong one, or that it mayn't be a comfort to Mrs. Weir, or set you more free. But I do think that it is against the common ways of the world, and, in a measure, of the Bible, too, and so I don't think it will answer."

"The Bible!" she exclaimed, "well, that is too foolish! What has the Bible to do with our taking Stonecliff?"

"You know, Miss Milicent," I replied, "that when God ordered men to marry he told them that they were not only to cleave to their wives, but to leave their fathers and mothers. It strikes me that must have meant that they were to live distinct, what we call setting up housekeeping for themselves. And being placed in separate families, I suppose we should do well to remain so."

"It is no argument, at all," exclaimed Miss Milicent. "If people were to act in that way, the world couldn't go on."

I did not feel that it was an argument; a great deal might be said against it; but I did think it a kind of hint, and I knew that it was safer to follow God's hints than man's reasons. But Miss Milicent was not a person whom any one could really talk to with any hope of convincing her. That one great omission in her duties—her neglect of her mother—had warped her mind. She never dared look her own motives in the face; and so, though naturally truth-telling and open, she had got into a way of deceiving herself. She did not like Mrs. Temple; she neither trusted nor respected her; but she liked anything better than hav-

ing her time taken up by attending upon her mother; and so she smoothed it all over, and thought she was only wishing to do what would be best for every one, and make Mrs. Weir most comfortable. She would not, however, say this, when she found that I did not give in; she kept on repeating that it was only an idea, it might never come to anything. Mrs. Temple might change her mind; Mrs. Weir might not like it. But I knew in my heart that it would come, even if it had been twenty times as objectionable. I knew it as surely as we may all know by experience, that the proposal which is brought forward year after year, by those who rule the nation, let it be never so contrary to long established custom, or even justice and religion, will in the end become law, because people will have become accustomed to it. If Miss Milicent had been told the first night of Mrs. Temple's arrival, that she could ever have endured the prospect of living with her, she would have said it was impossible. Watching the course of the world, I have often thought, that if we could see the devil himself frequently, we should at last learn to like him.

CHAPTER XXXI.

And so I went back to Sandcombe,—with what feelings of vexation and disappointment there is no need to say. Miss Milicent pressed my having tea, but I had no heart to stay. Perhaps I was more worried than I ought to have been; and if I could have thrown off all care for Mrs. Weir and her concerns, it might have been the happier for me. But it was not in my nature to do that; I did really love her; I would have done anything in my power to comfort her; whilst I dare say there was something of wounded pride, in the knowledge that now I was no longer necessary to her. As an especial aggravation, came the consciousness that with all her goodness she was very likely to be prejudiced, and that nothing would be more easy than for Mrs. Temple to continue to insinuate things to my disadvantage,—even as she had already begun. I had said nothing to Miss Milicent about the broken chess-man, I felt ashamed of justifying my-

self from such a charge; but I made up my mind not to go to the Heath again for some time, lest I might give some fresh cause of offence; and especially I resolved to wait until some more settled plan had been decided about Stonecliff. I had no confidence in Miss Milicent's tact or discretion; and I was sure that what I said was likely to be repeated to Mrs. Temple, and by her to be turned in some way against me. The visit did me good, however, in one way; it kept me from pining after my former life, and enabled me to sit down more contentedly to my duties at Sandcombe; and these soon became quite sufficient to occupy me thoroughly.

Leah, as I expected, took kindly enough to the notion of a school-girl coming to help,—that was the way she talked of it, and I could not put any other idea into her head, though I knew well enough that the help which a girl of that age could give was much less than the trouble of looking after her. Still I felt it was right to aid Mrs. Richardson if possible. The three head girls in the school were to go out at once. Mrs. Kemp was to take one; another was to work at the Parsonage; and Esther Smithson was to come to us. The plan was not actually carried out till after harvest, when we were obliged to have extra help. Up to that time we had a girl on baking and washing and brewing days; but the maid and I managed to do all the rest of the work, of course with the assistance of Leah; who, to say the truth, was not so much a fine lady as selfish and disposed to be lazy. I did not dislike the life; indeed I should have been fond of it, if I had been living with people who understood and gave me sympathy. But it was all business and money-getting from morning till night; the very clods of earth seemed to be looked at only with the thought of how they might be turned into bank notes and gold. Yet it was only for a year, I said to myself, and when I had received Roger's first letter, telling me he had arrived in Canada, and was making himself useful to the gentleman who took him out, and looking out for the best means of settling himself permanently, I felt as if half the time of separation was over.

One thing I felt about Sandcombe was that it was very out of the way. To be sure the same might have been said

of Dene, but there I had interest enough in the place and the people, never to wish to go further, except to Longside, where I was always welcome. At Sandcombe, though Leah often went out, and sometimes had friends to tea, there were none whom I cared particularly to meet; and indeed, as often as not, Leah would make the excuse of my being at home for William and herself to go out and leave me behind.

It was about half-past four o'clock one afternoon, just in the beginning of September; I had been sitting at work by myself, making a silk jacket for Jane Shaw, whose wedding was to come off in about three weeks, and who had asked me to do some little things she had not time for herself, and did not choose to put into the hands of a town dress-maker. I was enjoying being alone, and counting the days till I could hear again from Roger; Leah had been in and out of the parlour all the afternoon, doing first one thing and then another; and a few words with her, and the farm-house sounds, which I always liked particularly, prevented me from feeling lonely, especially as I was very intent upon my work, wishing to finish it that evening. Presently Leah came in to me in a hurry, and said, "Ursie, there's a chaise coming down the lane; I do think it must be the Kemps. I wish you would just go and skim the milk for me, for Martha is too busy, and you must mind and bring in cream enough for tea. If it is the Kemps they will be sure to stay."

This was a little instance of the kind of thing Leah was constantly doing. She knew the Kemps always came particularly to see me, and that I should be vexed at missing any part of their visit, but she still seized upon them as an excuse for making me do her duties. I said nothing, however, but put down my work directly, and went to the dairy, looking up the lane as I passed through the yard, and seeing Mrs. Kemp and Mary in the chaise, and John Hervey driving them, as was natural.

I was detained longer in the dairy than I intended, for Martha was untidy in her ways, and I happened to see the bucket which the man was going to use for the evening milking, and it was not properly washed; so I had to find fault,

which was what I very much disliked, as I always felt that fault-finding ought never to be the business of more than one person in a house. Martha was cross, too, and would do just contrary to what I wished. She saw visitors, and knew they were likely to give her work and keep her in the house, and I was sure she wanted to be out of doors gossiping, a thing which she particularly liked, and I especially dreaded. Altogether it was as much as half an hour before I could get back to the parlour.

Leah made a kind of apology when I went in, and said she did not think I should have been kept so long; "but you need not mind so much, Ursie," she added, "for Mrs. Kemp has come to drink tea."

"I did not say that," replied Mrs. Kemp, good-naturedly; "though a cup of tea never comes amiss. But the days are beginning to close in, and we must not be late, especially as we are driving."

John Hervey laughed, and said that was a slur on his driving. He could make his way over the hill at midnight, he was sure; and if he could not, the horse could, which was better.

"Fogs are worse than darkness, I always think," said Mary Kemp; "and there is one coming up now I do believe."

No one had noticed it before, yet it was already quite thick; but that was the way with those sea fogs, they rushed over the hill all of a sudden, and then cleared away, as it seemed, without any cause.

"I thought, Ursie," said John, "that you might have been at Compton lately, which was one reason I had for coming here. I have not been there myself, I can't tell the time when."

"Mrs. Weir is going to take Stonecliff, so William heard in Hove, on Saturday," said Leah. "But Ursie is so close, we have not heard it from her, even if she knows it."

Mr. Hervey only remarked that he never believed one half of what he heard in Hove.

"Had not I better go and see about tea?" I asked, for I wanted an excuse to go away. I never liked talking about Mrs. Weir before strangers.

"Perhaps you might as well," said Leah. "Here is the key of the closet. I wish you would bring in some of that pound cake which William is so fond of. I should like Mrs. Kemp to taste it."

"Pound cake of your making, Ursie?" asked Mrs. Kemp.

"Yes," I said. "It was one of Mrs. Mason's receipts; but Martha was careless with the oven, and it is rather burnt."

"Martha is enough to plague one's life out," said Leah. "If we were not going to try this new girl from the Compton school, I should tell William we must send her away."

"When is your new girl coming?" asked Mrs. Kemp.

"To-morrow, I believe; isn't it, Ursie? It is Ursie's concern. She has undertaken to teach her."

"Not quite," I replied. "I said I would look after her as well as I could in the morning, but I never promised more."

"I shall wish you joy if she is like our girl, Ursie," said Mary Kemp; "she is duller than dull; Kitty Hobson was a treasure to her."

"And what has become of Kitty?" asked Leah.

"She's gone to be kitchen-maid at Mr. Stewart's," replied Mrs. Kemp. "I knew the cook, and she promised to look after her, and I have great hopes that Kitty will turn out well."

"More than I have," said Leah; "but girls are all alike. I dare say we shan't find this new one any better than the rest."

"It depends upon what you expect," said Mrs. Kemp. "One can't put old heads on young shoulders, and so one must make up one's mind to take trouble, and look after them, else of course they will go wrong. I was obliged to be strict with Kitty, for when she came to Longside first, she was out in the yard talking at all hours; but my Mary took her in hand, and gave her plenty to do, and saw that she did it, and sent her to bed early, before the men and boys had their supper, and by the time she left us, we had worked her out of a good many of her idle ways. Then, to be sure, I must say Mary has a way with her," added Mrs. Kemp,

with a mother's pride. "She used to make the girl read to her on Sundays; and now and then Kitty sat with her and helped in the house needle-work, and that gave her a notion of being more tidy and respectable in her ways. It was giving her a lift in the world, which I suppose is what we all want."

I had lingered to hear what Mrs. Kemp was saying, hoping to gain some hints for myself, but I saw Leah look impatient, and indeed time was running on fast, and, much against my inclination, I went to get tea.

I did not notice that John Hervey followed me, but, as I was taking the cake out of the closet, he came behind me, and quite startled me by offering to carry it for me.

"You don't want me," he said, laughing, as he noticed my look of surprise.

"To tell the truth, I don't think I do," I replied; "Leah is not fond of having persons spying about her cupboards."

"I don't want to look at the cupboard, I only want to have a few words with you, Ursie; and there is no chance of our being alone, that I can see. Have you heard about Mrs. Weir and Stonecliff?"

"Since you ask," I replied, "I must needs say I have; but it is no business of mine."

He stood thinking; then he said, "It won't d sie, and it ought to be prevented."

"Who is to prevent it?" I said. "What business have either you or I with it?"

"With me it's just this," he answered. "Mrs. Weir's family have always been very kind to my family; and if it was not for them I shouldn't be where I am. She is left here to manage for herself, with no more knowledge than a baby what to do; and Miss Milicent not much wiser; and so, if one sees them likely to make a blunder, one would fain, if one could, stop them."

"If you mean as regards money," I said, "Miss Milicent is not likely to be misled there; she has a sharp eye."

"Not so sharp as Mrs. Temple," said John; "she will squeeze every penny out of them, if they live together, and make her share of expenses a third, instead of half. I know

her of old, for I have had dealings with her. Ursie, you must try and talk over Miss Milicent."

"Not I," I replied. "I have given up trying to talk over any one. The world must go its own way."

A cloud came over his face. "That is not as you used to talk, Ursie," he said. "I remember the time when you would have made any venture to be of use to such a friend as Mrs. Weir has been to you."

"That was when I was young," I said, trying to laugh, though my heart was heavy. "I have grown wiser since."

"It can't be wisdom to let people go to ruin without stretching out a hand to save them," he replied.

"Who is to say it is ruin?" I replied; "I am sure I couldn't. Indeed, Mr. Hervey, we must leave Mrs. Weir to manage her own concerns; or, if any one is to interfere, it can't be myself."

"It won't be," he said, rather quickly. "Well! Ursie, I didn't think you were so changeable."

I turned round upon him at the word. "Changeable!" I exclaimed; "I am sure I have never shown myself so."

"One week bent upon living with Mrs. Weir, and the next not troubling yourself to go near her, and not willing to put yourself out of your way to serve her," he said; "I don't know what you call that but changeable."

"I know what I call fault-finding without reason or knowledge, Mr. Hervey," I said; for, my proud temper being roused, I could not bring myself to explain what made me seem changeable.

He turned off with a laugh; but I noticed that, instead of going back to the parlour, he went out into the garden; and my conscience reproached me, for I knew I had been wrong. Still he had no business to take me to task in that way; and it was talking in ignorance to suppose that I had any power to prevent Mrs. Weir and Miss Milicent from doing whatever they wished. I fancied that I had some right to be cross with him, and I was cross, and said to myself that, with all his good-natured looks and ways, he was much more fond of ordering and correcting than Roger. So far, Mary Kemp was well fitted to him. She would obey him without a word. As for me, I had not yet thoroughly learnt to obey any one.

Leah was quite put out when I went back, I had been so long getting tea. She asked me what I had been doing.

"Talking to John Hervey," said Mary Kemp, laughing; "I saw them together."

"Yes," I replied; "Mr. Hervey came out after me, and we had a few words together; but I should have been quicker, only the water did not boil."

"I don't think it boils now," said Leah, pouring out a cup of tea. "There's no strength in the tea. Come, Mrs. Kemp, take your seat; and Mary, there's a place for you. Ursie, just run out into the yard, will you? and tell William to come; he's sure to be there."

I did as I was asked, and turning the corner of the house sharply, I came full upon John Hervey.

"Friends, Ursie," he said, and he held out his hand to me.

"Friends, if you will," I answered; "but I didn't know we were enemies, Mr. Hervey."

"Well! not quite enemies," he said smiling; "only just inclined to snap at one another. But, Ursie, you will have a thought for Mrs. Weir, if possible?"

He seemed the most pertinacious man I had ever met with, the most determined to carry his point; and so, out of a mere spirit of contradiction, I answered: "I have a great many thoughts for Mrs. Weir always, Mr. Hervey. Whether I shall have many words is quite another question."

"You are a perverse body," he said, lightly; and he went into the house, leaving me vexed that I had not been able to vex him more. It was not that I didn't like and respect him heartily, but I believe nothing provokes us women more than to find that we can't tease when we wish to do so.

Tea was rather hurried over, for the fog was becoming heavier. William said they had better wait for the chance of its clearing off after the sun went down, but Mrs. Kemp thought the farmer would be fidgety, and they had better get home as soon as they could. She pressed me very much to go and spend a day with them at Longside, but Leah declared I couldn't be spared. The new girl was coming, and I should be wanted to teach her.

"Look after her, more than teach her, Ursie," said Mrs

Kemp to me, in a low voice, which Leah couldn't hear. "And, lassie, if you can with truth, give her a little praise at first setting off. The Farmer says it's needful for us all, as capital to begin the world with."

Mary Kemp was anxious to go; she was rather a coward, and if the fog continued, she declared they were as likely as not to miss their way. But, in spite of all she could say, Mr. Hervey would linger to say a few words to me about Roger. I had forgotten my perverseness, and was very glad to talk to him upon the subject nearest my heart, but I could not help thinking that he was not as mindful of Mary as he might have been, and it give me the first really uncomfortable feeling I had ever had about him; a misgiving lest, after all, he might be selfish, and even rather cold, in spite of his hearty, pleasant ways.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Esther Smithson was at Sandcombe the next morning by half-past six o'clock: that was as early as could be expected, for she had a good way to walk. Leah took it as a matter of course that I was to be down-stairs to look after her, and I was not sorry for it, as it enabled me at once to arrange her work, so as to put her to that which was most fitting for her. I found her untidy, but clever and willing. From the first I was determined that she should not be made a mere drudge to wait upon the men, and Martha and I had a little fight upon the subject that very morning, but I gained my point. My mother would have been particular about me, and it was my duty to be particular about Esther, all the more because she came of an idle family, and was likely to have a bad example set her at home. But I was not to have my own way quite so easily. When the morning work was over, and William, and Leah, and I, sat down to dinner, Leah said to me, "Well! Ursie, what do you think of Esther? is she likely to do?"

"It is early to judge," I replied, "but she seems willing and handy. She set out the breakfast-things quite cleverly."

"Set out the breakfast-things!" exclaimed Leah; "you don't mean to say she has been in here this morning?" and she looked round the room with a turn of her lip, as though she had seen something disagreeable.

"It was part of her business," I said; "I saw how she did it, and took care that she was tidy and clean in her ways; and I found her very willing to learn."

William spoke now, and quite in Leah's tone. "I must tell you once for all, Ursie, for it is better to come to an understanding plainly, I don't want your dirty, slatternly school-girls fussing about in my parlour. They have the kitchen and the scullery for their proper place, and I must beg you will keep them there."

"But Esther is come to learn to be a servant," I said, "and she can't learn if she is not put in the way."

"She is come to make herself useful," said Leah, "and specially to take the odds and ends of work, which you, and I, and Martha, don't choose to do."

"Mrs. Richardson doesn't understand this," was my reply. "The agreement was that Esther was to be taught."

"And she will be taught," replied Leah. "If she is a girl of any sense, she will learn of her own accord; and if she has no sense, all the teaching in the world won't give her any."

"We have not set up a school for idiots, yet," said William, with a short laugh.

"It is what Ursie will set up some day, I do believe," replied Leah.

"Mrs. Mason used to take a great deal of pains with me, and I should like to do the same with Esther," I replied; "and as for trying to teach, unless one is willing to make sacrifices, it seems to me nonsense to attempt it."

"Possibly," replied Leah, "but we don't profess to teach here; the teaching has been done at Compton school. When girls go out into the world, they must learn to make their own way."

"Toss them in, and let them sink or swim as they may," I exclaimed, rather bitterly. "Leah, that was not your case nor mine."

"It was mine," exclaimed Leah. "I went my own way

from the time I left Mrs. Prince's school at Hove, and that was when I was fifteen, just a few months older than Esther Smithson." She drew herself up with a proud air, as though defying any one to say a word against her.

I was silent; it was no use to continue the argument, and, after all, Leah was mistress. But, in my own mind, I determined that if I found it really impossible to be of use to the poor child, I would ask Mrs. Richardson to look out for another situation for her.

Leah watched me narrowly, after that conversation, being afraid, I could see, that I was going to make too much of Esther, but I was careful not to offend her; and, indeed, I did not wish myself to be too particular about the girl. I only wanted to give her the kind of work which would keep her out of the way of gossiping and idle talking with the men about the farm. Esther was much given to chattering, and, though I did not encourage her, she told me of her own accord some things which I certainly was much interested in hearing.

Her mother had been sent for to work at Stonecliff, the large house under Compton heath. It was to be cleaned and put in order for a family who were to take possession almost immediately, and Esther said she was nearly sure that it was Mrs. Temple who had given all the orders. This confirmed Mr. Hervey's information, and settled my mind as to saying anything to Miss Milicent. If matters had gone as far as that, it would be useless.

The news was confirmed a few days after; when, as I was sitting alone by myself, at work, there was a knock at the front door and I heard some one say:

"Is Ursula Grant at home?" The voice took me quite by surprise. It was Mrs Temple's. I thought I had better go out to her. She was in a little pony chaise; one that belonged to the hotel, and Captain Temple was with her. I asked them to get out and walk in, and the Captain seemed willing, but Mrs. Temple declined. They must return at once, she said. She had only called about a little matter of business; perhaps it would be as well to see Mrs. Grant. "Mrs. Grant is not at home, Ma'am," I replied; for Leah had gone over to her mother at Hatton.

"Well then! perhaps you will do as well, if you will explain. My dear, the pony is fidgety, just get out and stand by its head." And Mr. Temple, being always obedient, alighted.

A cold wind was blowing, and I was afraid of tooth-ache, and put my apron round my head, but Mrs. Temple did not notice it, and kept me standing in the draught. "I wanted to inquire about having butter from Sandcombe," she said. "I shall want enough for rather a large family;—Mr. Temple, and myself, Mrs. and Miss Weir, and our servants, besides friends;—we are to be at Stonecliff." She looked at me as though I had been an utter stranger, who had never heard of her before.

I did not appear surprised, or even interested, but merely said, "We send our butter to Hove, Ma'am, generally."

"I suppose you do; but of course you would be willing to accommodate persons in the neighbourhood. We find it difficult to procure good butter, and I am particular about it."

"I will speak to Mrs. Grant," was my reply.

I think she was struck by the tone, for she added more graciously, "Mrs. Weir would have a claim upon you, I am sure."

"Certainly, Ma'am, my brother and I—all of us would do anything we could for Mrs Weir," I answered. "But the butter can always be bought at Hove."

"Yes, perhaps so; but I should prefer—you have a girl here who comes from Compton School, she might bring it over."

She was bent upon saving the carriage, I saw that in an instant.

"The girl's hours would scarcely suit, I am afraid, Ma'am," I replied; "and the butter for a large family would be a load for her."

"Oh! a strong girl; she would not care, and she must learn to make herself useful. Mrs. Richardson would wish it. She is one of the Compton girls, I know there can be no difficulty."

"I could promise a pound occasionally, for Mrs. Weir, Ma'am," I said, "but I would not undertake for more.

The butter has been sent to Hove now for a good many years, but of course I could speak about it to Mrs. Grant."

"I shall call again, and speak for myself," she exclaimed. "I am not accustomed to incivility. My dear," and she touched her husband with the driving-whip, "my dear, are you ready? We must call again another day; or perhaps,—tell Mrs. Grant I should wish to see her if she should be coming over to Compton in the course of the next week."

I curtsied, and Mrs. Temple drove off.

Was it not irritating?—and she professing herself to be so wonderfully good, so Christian-like. It would have made me doubt whether anything like real religion and humility were to be found in the world, if I had not known persons like Mrs. Weir, and Mr. and Mrs. Richardson. Curiously enough, Mrs. Temple always came over me as something new. It takes a long time to make one believe that persons with high professions can really be self-deceivers, and whenever I was away from Mrs. Temple, I took myself to task for disliking her as I did, and suspected it might be my own fault that we were not friends. "Perhaps," I sometimes said to myself, "if I was more in earnest, I should enter more into her ways of going on, and understand them better." But it was no use to scold myself; one meeting was enough to make me turn from her as much as ever.

But the thing which worried me now far more than Mrs. Temple's ungraciousness, was the thought that Mrs. Weir and Miss Milicent were so entirely under her influence, and that they could so have forgotten their old kindliness for me, as to make such a great change as that of moving from the Heath to Stonecliff, and joining housekeeping with Mrs. Temple, without troubling themselves to let me know that it was a settled plan. I dare say they had spoilt me in a measure in former days, and made me too much their friend; but I own I felt as though I had been dealt unkindly by, and my first impulse was to take my revenge by not helping them in return. Leah was little likely to upset the arrangements of her dairy, to please either Mrs. Weir or Mrs. Temple, and though I had said truly that the butter could be bought at Hove, I had a strong suspicion that it was nearly always caught up at once by old customers. But I was in a better mind than that before Leah came home. I had an old

habit, I don't remember exactly when or how I began it, of reading the Evening Psalms about that time in the day, and when I had put out the tea-things, I went up to my room and took out my prayer-book as usual, and somehow or other the very act of doing it made me feel what a sinful temper I was indulging. There was a hard struggle before I could overcome it, but God helped me, and I gained the victory, and that same evening I tried, though unsuccessfully, to persuade Leah to alter her market arrangements to suit them. I was vexed at having failed, but satisfied at having made the attempt, and never suspected that any fault could be laid at my door.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Christmas came. It would take too much time to note all that happened before, though there was a good deal in different ways, both at home and abroad. Jane Shaw was married; that, I think, was the greatest event of all. Of course I was not asked to the wedding, but Jessie Lee was; and very pretty she looked, as I was told, and very much notice she had in consequence from Captain Price's gay friends. Her little head was sadly turned, for the time, by the flattery she received. She came over to us once or twice dressed so handsomely, that I really felt ashamed for her; but she took what I said to her about it very properly, and if she did not alter her ways, at least she was not angry with me for trying to induce her to do so. She was a great deal at Dene, which was what I disliked more than anything.

Mrs. Morris and Leah quite changed their tone about her, when they found how much was made of her there. Instead of a drudge, they seemed resolved to turn her into a young lady; and to own the truth, she played the part better than many who set up for being well born and well bred. What kind of society there was at Dene I could not well understand. No one whom we knew, except Jessie, ever visited, or even went there, unless it might be now and then on business; but rumours reached us which were anything

but satisfactory to me, though William and Leah appeared to think little enough about them.

Leah was possessed with the idea that I was jealous of Jessie; and so, if I ever made a remark upon anything I had heard, or repeated any of the stories which now and then came to my ears, I was only half believed. Leah could not see as I did, that the very fact of having Jessie's name mixed up with people like Captain and Mrs. Price, whom every one was talking about, was to her disadvantage. I relieved myself, when I was very much worried with this sort of thing, by writing it all out to Roger. I had always been accustomed to tell him every trouble as it arose; and I had no doubt of his taking part in this, for he never failed to mention Jessie in his letters, and to beg that I would remember him to her. Poor fellow! before Christmas came, he was beginning to be very homesick, for troubles had come upon the gentleman he was with, and so in a measure upon him. Yet he wrote cheerfully, and seemed quite resolved to be brave and bear the hardships well, and in time he said there was no doubt that things would be brighter. At any rate, he might work independently whenever he chose. I tried not to see that he said less about having me with him. The possible idea of remaining away from him longer than a year was so dreadful, that I would not face it. I bore the worries of Sandcombe well enough in the hope of a speedy end, but I did not know what I should do if there was any prospect of there being a lasting burden. Taken separately indeed they were but trifles, but put together they were sometimes very heavy.

Busy times were the pleasantest. Leah was in good humour whenever she was roused to be very active; and one of the most peaceful seasons I ever remember whilst I was with her, was in November, when the whole house was at work for two days, salting meat and melting lard. It was all to be done at once, so there was no leisure for grumbling; and as it happened, Esther Smithson made herself remarkably useful, and was in consequence hired for extra work in the afternoon; and Leah even said to me that she thought I must have taken pains with her, for she was turning out a very handy girl. This pleased me, I own, for certainly I did take

a good deal of pains with Esther in one way and another; and though she had some faults which it was very difficult to overcome, I could see that at any rate she had not gone back since she worked at Sandcombe.

My time and thoughts were occupied more and more every day with Sandcombe, and I dare say it was right that it should have been so, but there was a place in my heart still, which was filled with remembrances of Dene and care for Mrs. Weir. How soon portions of one's life become like a dream to one! I was living scarcely more than a mile and a half from Mrs. Weir, I heard her name constantly, there were opportunities for going over to see her tolerably often, yet by the time Christmas arrived I felt quite removed from her. The days when I used to be allowed to go and sit with her, and read to her, and nurse and comfort, and be useful to her, seemed like the days of my childhood, calm and bright, happy with an untold happiness, but too indistinct to give me the feeling that they had once formed part of my own existence.

Yet nothing had occurred outwardly to alter Mrs. Weir's kindly feelings towards me, and I could not with truth say that they were altered; but she was living with Mrs. Temple at Stonecliff, and this put me always on my guard when I was with her, lest what I said should be repeated, and then taken up and turned against me. I was not so open, therefore, as I used to be, and no doubt Mrs. Weir found it more difficult to talk to me. There was a kind of floating mist between us, and though I loved and honoured her too much ever really to alter in my feelings towards her, yet I must confess it now vexed me to know that I was at Mrs. Temple's mercy; and every now and then I could not help perceiving symptoms of distrust which went to my heart.

But there was one person who, I must say, never changed, nor showed the slightest symptom of change. Miss Milicent and I had lived together rather in the cat-and-dog style at Dene; but we liked each other at heart, and now that we were no longer in danger of mutual interference, I think we began to see more clearly our respective good points.

One thing I certainly did wonder at very much. I used to imagine Miss Milicent such a determined person; one

whom it was impossible to lead, who would go her own way, and that often a very strange way. But I begin to think that people who are self-willed and troublesome in temper, are often as tired of their own humours and oddities as their friends can be; and as willing, but for their pride, to give way, if they meet with a will stronger than their own.

The day before Christmas-eve I was asked over to Longside. Mrs. Kemp wished me to go the next evening, but there were reasons against it; one which concerned only myself. I wished to have a quiet time before Christmas-day. Mr. Richardson had lately given some cautions and directions about preparing for Christmas, which I was desirous, if possible, to attend to, for I was beginning to be more careful not to neglect advice upon these points. Being so much alone tended to make me thoughtful. I always made a point of telling Leah what I meant to do in the way of going for a walk, or drinking tea with a friend; it was due to her, though she had no absolute control over me; but it was a sore trial sometimes; she had such a provoking way of suggesting difficulties. I often felt, when I had gained my point, as though I had been struggling through a furze bush, and was pricked all over.

"Going to Longside!" she exclaimed, that day after dinner, when I happened to mention Mrs. Kemp's invitation. "Why! you'll be frozen. There must be snow before long."

"Not much appearance of it at present," I said; "the sky is clear."

"And you can't set off till late, for I have kept Esther here to help this afternoon."

"I don't quite see why that should prevent me," I replied.

"Only that you know she always gets into a scrape, if you are not by to look after her. She and Martha never hit it off together."

"I am afraid they must learn to do so," I said. "I can scarcely undertake to be Esther's guardian all day."

"Martha trusted her to wash the milk-buckets, and clean the pans, last time she stayed," continued Leah, "and she did it disgracefully. I shall be obliged to see to it myself next."

"I will give her a caution if you think it necessary," I replied; "but perhaps it would come better from you, as you are the mistress. I did not know though that it would be necessary to keep her, as there is not so very much to do."

"Really, Ursie, you are enough to try the temper of a saint," exclaimed Leah. "Not much to do! with all the dairy-work and the poultry, and tea, and supper, and the day after to-morrow Christmas-day!"

I tried not to smile, as I answered, "I did not think of putting you to inconvenience; my work, as you know, does not interfere much with yours in the afternoon."

"No, indeed, it doesn't," exclaimed Leah; "you sit in the parlour with your needle till you have not the least idea of what is going on in the house. If you were mistress, as I am, you would soon see that it does not do to go gadding about the country whenever the fancy seizes one. Esther is not to be trusted with the dairy-work at all," she added, in an under tone.

"Well, then! let Martha undertake to scour the pans," I said, "and Esther can do something else."

"Martha has her hands full," replied Leah.

"If you like," I said, "I can have an eye to the milk-buckets and the pans before I go. There is no difficulty in the matter, except Esther's carelessness."

"I don't know what difficulty you would have greater," observed Leah; "and it is nonsense of you, Ursie, to talk of waiting to look after her; why you wouldn't be off before dark; and how are you to come back again? You can't think of bringing Farmer Kemp out at night to walk such a distance, and I am sure you ought not to come alone."

"Mary said her father would not at all mind the walk," I replied; "and if it should be a bad night he would drive me back."

Leah made no reply, but just as she was going out of the room, she turned round and said, "I wish you just to remember, Ursie, that if there are complaints about the milk and butter, it won't be my fault."

I could have found it in my heart at the moment to give up my visit, anything seemed better than to have to bear

these taunts, but I knew that I should gain nothing by yielding. Leah would only have called me perverse, and determined to make myself a martyr. I resolved, though, that she should have no real cause for complaint, and therefore I went to Esther, and took her myself into the dairy to show her exactly what she was to do, telling her especially that she was to give herself plenty of time, so as to have the pans quite ready for the new milk when it should be brought in. There really was nothing else of any consequence to be attended to, for as to the preparations for Christmas-day, I had been busy with them all the morning, and William was not so bountiful to his people as to require much to be done for them.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Leah kept out of my way, and did not say good-bye to me. I went off with a mixed feeling—a light heart from the prospect of my holiday, but a heavy one from the thought of the constant fret of temper which I was to bear—no one could say how long. The light-heartedness, however, won the day by the time I had reached the top of the Down, and could look over the sea, with the white waves curling and tossing as they rushed in upon the shore. I stood for a few moments to enjoy the sight, and then finding I had more time than I expected, I took it into my head to go to the summit of St. Anne's Hill and stand by the ruined oratory, as I had done on that evening when Roger first told me that we might be parted. I went up so quickly that I was quite out of breath, and when I reached the tower, I rested against the wall to recover myself. I did not know that any one was near till I heard a little cough, and when I looked round the corner I saw Jessie Lee.

Like myself, she was leaning against the tower with an open letter in her hand, which she was trying to read; but the wind caught it every instant, so that she could scarcely manage it. "You had better come round this side, and not face the wind in that way, Jessie," I said gently, not wishing to startle her.

But she did start, and stand up, and the colour came to her cheeks, and mounted up to her forehead, while she crumpled up the letter in her hand, and tried to hide it.

"I didn't mean to frighten you," I said; "but I was going to Longside, when the fancy took me to run up here for a few minutes and look round. The air on St. Anne's always does one good."

"Yes, it is very fresh. I didn't know you were going to Longside. I think I must say good-bye;" and Jessie moved away.

But I called after her. "Don't run off in such a hurry," I said as she came back; "it is not often that we meet now, Jessie; you are always gay or busy."

"Sometimes; I am not busy now," she answered, stopping unwillingly.

"Only gay?" I said.

The words seemed to strike her like a mockery; she turned round upon me quite sharply. "You didn't use to be fond of sneering, Ursie."

"I never meant to sneer, Jessie," I replied; "I only repeat what others say."

"And I thought you knew better than to believe the world's talk," she answered. "No one can call Hatton a gay place."

"Not Hatton, but Dene," I said. "You must own, Jessie, that Captain and Mrs. Price keep open house."

"It is their concern, not mine," she answered; "why should people talk about me?"

She spoke hastily; but I suspect she was not entirely vexed that people should talk of her, in whatever way it might be.

"We must live in the desert, if we mean not to be talked about in this world," I said; "and even then I suppose people would be troubling themselves to guess why we went there."

"And that is why I wonder you take any heed to what you hear about me, Ursie," continued Jessie; "you know so well how foolish it all is."

"I am not quite so sure of that," I said gravely. "I don't think, Jessie, that any girl's name is ever mentioned

lightly, unless she herself has given cause for it; at least, that is what Mrs. Kemp has often said to me, and Roger used to tell me the same."

Jessie stood with one foot forward, wishing, I could see, to run away from me, but at the mention of Roger's name she drew it back, and her fingers seemed to grasp more firmly the letter which she held.

"Roger wasn't well when you last heard from him, was he?" she said, in a careless tone.

"Not very; the cold tries him. I must go out to him as soon as I can, to take care of him."

"He will want that," she said.

"Yes; he takes very little thought for himself."

"But he likes Canada?" continued Jessie.

"Yes, in a way; it will never be like England to him; he cares so much for his old friends."

Jessie looked up thoughtfully. "You tell him all the gossip about them, I suppose, Ursie."

"I tell him what I hear; sometimes truth, sometimes gossip, just as it may happen."

"And he believes it, of course?"

"He believes what I tell him is true."

"And if people say ill-natured things about me, he takes them for fact then," said Jessie.

"He takes for fact what I say is fact," I replied; "that Jessie Lee is too much at Dene for her happiness or for her good name."

"My good name!" she exclaimed; and her eyes, usually so sweet and soft in their expression, flashed like lightning. "I tell you what you may say to him, which will put a stop to any remarks upon my good name or my bad."

She waited a moment,—began to speak, stopped, and at length exclaimed, "Jessie Lee is going to be married;" and, seeing, I suppose, that I looked rather incredulous, she thrust her letter into my hand, saying, impatiently, "Read it; read it."

I turned away from the wind and opened the letter; Jessie watched me intently.

The handwriting was difficult to decipher; she thought I had reached the conclusion before I had made out the meaning of the first four lines.

"Well!" she said, "it's all true,—plain; no mistake, Ursie." Still I read on; when at length I came to the concluding words, I folded up the paper again, and gave it to Jessie without speaking.

"You see," she said, "it is an offer."

"Yes! an offer."

"And a very proper one. I shall be the wife of Lieutenant Macdonald, of the Marines. Roger will have nothing to say against that."

The tone of her voice was strange; there was more pique than pleasure in it. I thought I would try an experiment with her.

"No, Jessie," I said, "you will not be Mrs. Macdonald."

"Why not? Who is to hinder me?"

"Yourself. You don't know anything about Lieutenant Macdonald that is good, and what is more, you don't care for him."

"As for caring, he is very polite; you can't find fault with his letter."

"Yes I can," I said. "It is the letter of a man who has not a particle of respect for you, and thinks he has nothing to do but to flatter you; and, Jessie, you know as well as I do, that Lieutenant Macdonald's habits would make any woman miserable. Who would marry a drunkard?"

"You may just tell Roger that it is going to be," she said, laughing. "It will be a fine subject for your next letter."

I was provoked more than frightened. With all her folly, I believed that Jessie had too much real respect for goodness, thus deliberately to throw herself away; but then; her vanity,—it was such a fearful stumbling-block. I could not let her leave me in this wild mood.

"Jessie," I said, and I caught hold of her dress, and made her listen to me. "You were always fond of teasing, but this goes rather beyond what one can bear. You can't mean really to say 'Yes' to this man; but you will do a very wrong thing if you don't at once say, 'No.'"

"I don't know why I should," she replied. "You see, he says that if I cannot at once like him, he will be content to wait for what time may do."

"And for what purpose?" I inquired. "Do you think he is going to reform for the love of you?"

"He may," said Jessie. "Men do reform sometimes."

"But women are worse than mad who marry upon the chance of reformation," I said. "Jessie, even if you cared for him, there is not one of your friends who would consent to the marriage."

"I don't want consent," she replied, "at least, not yet; there is no hurry."

"Indeed, Jessie," I exclaimed, you are mistaken. There is no halting between yes and no in a case like this. If you don't mean to marry him, you have no business to keep him hanging on."

"I don't say that I shall not marry him," she replied.

"Well, then, you will talk to Mrs. Morris, and Leah, and your friends, and then, if they approve, you will say 'Yes.'"

"Perhaps 'Yes,' perhaps 'No.' I can't answer for what I may do."

She provoked me so that I jumped up, and spoke, I am afraid, hastily: "Jessie," I said, "this is wicked trifling. People talk lightly of love and marriage, but they are very serious matters, and we shall have to answer before God for the way in which we manage them. If Lieutenant Macdonald was a man whom you could respect, I could understand your hesitation. But he is a drunkard; his character is notorious. You know you have told me about him many times."

"He says he is very fond of me," said Jessie; and there was more real feeling in her tone than I could have imagined possible in connection with such a man.

I saw at once what was working in her mind. "Jessie," I said, gravely, "what is the love of a bad man worth?"

"Nothing, nothing; only, Ursie, it is very pleasant to be loved."

All the flippancy and perverseness of her manner had vanished, and she leaned her head upon my shoulder and cried bitterly. I thought of Longside, and felt I should be late, but what could I do. "Dear Jessie," I said, "it is very pleasant to be loved, there is no doubt of that, it is what we all long

for. But love alone won't make you happy, and, what is more, such love as this won't last. Lieutenant Macdonald may possibly think he cares for you much, but I am quite sure that he cares for himself more. He won't give up his wine and his bad companions to please you."

"Perhaps he will, if I ask him," persisted Jessie.

"But you have no right to ask him, unless you mean to do something for him in return; unless you have made up your mind to marry him, and that, you know, you have not. And, at all events, one thing is clear; you are bound to be open with Mrs. Morris in the matter, and to do nothing without consulting her."

Jessie stood twisting her letter into various shapes. Presently she said, rather bitterly, "You are not lonely as I am, Ursie."

"Not quite, I have Roger; but he is away."

"That is nothing; he thinks of you more than of any one else; he loves you best."

Why was it that a creeping misgiving seemed to glide through my veins, and chill my answer? I merely said, "Yes, I suppose he does."

"Suppose! you know it, you are sure of it," exclaimed Jessie, eagerly. "If I had a love like Roger's, Ursie, I could go through the world without a wish. I would work, slave, bear torture, anything to be loved first—best."

"But not by Lieutenant Macdonald," I said. "A drunkard! Oh, Jessie, think!" and I myself shuddered unconsciously at the idea.

She put her arm within mine without saying another word, and we moved away from the tower. Then she stopped, and said, "Which way are you going, Ursie?"

"Over the hill, to Longside. I ought to have been there half an hour ago."

"We can walk together, then, and you can go through Dene; no one will notice."

"Not together," I replied, "if you are bound for Hatton."

"I must go to Dene first," she answered with some hesitation; "I promised Mrs. Price to see her to-day."

"It would be better to write to Mr. Macdonald first," I said. "If he is at Dene, as I suppose, it will be awkward meeting him before you have written."

"He is not likely to be there. The gentlemen were all to be out shooting. That is why I promised to go. I must keep my word. Now, give me your hand and we'll run;" and she drew me with her to the brow of the hill.

CHAPTER XXXV.

I would not run down St. Anne's Hill, for it was a great deal too steep to be safe, and Jessie knew better than to attempt it; but she was in such a state of excitement, that really she scarcely knew what she said. When we reached the foot of the hill, I again urged her returning to Hatton. As to going through Dene myself, I did not like the idea, for my acquaintance with Mrs. Price had dropped since her marriage, and I did not desire to renew it, neither did I know how she was likely to look upon such an intrusion. Jessie could not understand my scruples. She was so at home at Dene herself, that she fancied every one else must be the same.

We went on in the direction of Dene, neither of us having quite made up our minds what to do, and I trying to persuade Jessie that it was more fitting for her at once to go back to Hatton, and put the case before Mrs. Morris, when, as we reached the little sheep-path leading off the down to Compton, who should we see coming up but Miss Milicent, dressed in a kind of loose great-coat and a close beaver bonnet, and helping herself to mount the hill by the aid of a heavy stick.

"Ursie Grant, is that you?" she called out. "Stop, will you? I want you."

She came up looking flushed and excited, but somewhat cautious, as she saw Jessie.

"I thought you were alone," she said, in a tone which Jessie could scarcely help hearing, and which made her stand aside for a few seconds, and then, to my great annoyance, walk on slowly by herself towards Dene. I called out after her, "Just wait, Jessie; I shall not be a minute."

"Yes, you will be, I have a good many things to say to you," said Miss Milicent. "Who is that girl?"

"A kind of cousin of my sister-in-law, Miss Milicent," I replied. "If you will excuse me, I must not let her walk alone."

"Why not? She is no baby. Where is she going?"

"I am not quite sure; perhaps to Dene."

"To Dene! That is just where I am going, and you are going with me."

"Indeed, Miss Milicent, I don't know," I said, taken quite by surprise. "I will walk with you to the gate; but I can't say about going in."

"It is going in that I am bent upon. I have a great deal to say to you, Ursie Grant. Can't that girl walk on instead of waiting? She is a very pretty girl. I like her face."

It was a face to like, especially at that moment. There was so much thoughtfulness in it. I could see that Jessie was having a struggle with herself. She was almost determined to go back to Hatton. If we had but been alone I should have persuaded her.

"That is your way," I said to her, laughingly, yet in a tone I knew she must understand, and I pointed to Hatton.

"And this is our way to Dene," said Miss Milicent, leading me to the beginning of the sloping green pathway on the side of the down. "I am not going there to pay a visit—only on business, and you can let Mrs. Price understand this."

Jessie caught the word Dene. "Then you are going to Dene, Ursie," she said.

"Ursie Grant and I are both going there," said Miss Milicent. "She knows Mrs. Price, and I don't; though I have had dealings enough with her of one kind and another."

"I knew Jane Shaw; I don't know Mrs. Price," I replied. "She is too fine a lady for me, Miss Milicent; and, indeed, she will be likely to receive you much better without me."

"I know Mrs. Price very well," said Jessie, with scarcely concealed satisfaction at having what she considered a grand friend.

"Do you? Then you will be just the person to say what I want," said Miss Milicent; "only you will just let Ursie Grant and me walk aside and have a little talk together."

It was most unfortunate. My first impulse was to leave

Jessie and Miss Milicent to manage their visit as they could, and make my way at once to Longside; but then I was so afraid to trust Jessie alone, knowing how easily she might be persuaded to stay and see Mr. Macdonald again; and even if her present intentions were good, which I was not sure of, I could not for a moment have depended upon them, if she were placed in the way of temptation. Care for him she did not, but she might be flattered by his admiration, and touched by his expressions of affection; and how many women marry, and make themselves miserable for life, under no greater inducement!

Miss Milicent took no notice of my hesitation, but telling Jessie to go on to the white gate, and wait for us, she planted herself deliberately in my way, and said, in an under tone, "We have had news of my father, Ursie."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed. I must have changed colour from surprise, for Miss Milicent added directly, "You look as white as my mother did. She shook like an aspen leaf, and went into a fit. She would have gone quite, if Matilda Temple had not scolded her."

"Oh! Miss Milicent, scolded her!" I exclaimed; "who could do that? Poor lady! no wonder she was upset."

"No wonder, indeed. If you had been there to see it! We had such a scene! But Matilda Temple didn't carry the day, though she tried hard for it. She would have kept the letter from my mother if she could."

"And you heard from Mr. Weir himself?" I said.

"No, only from a gentleman abroad who has seen him, and knows where he is, and tells us that if we want to hear more of him we must find out a Lieutenant Macdonald. He is at Dene, Ursie, and that is why I am going there."

It was a most incoherent story. I could make nothing of it, and I had to ask many questions before I found out the whole. John Hervey, it seems, had been doing for Mrs. Weir what he wished me to do; he had been keeping his eyes and ears open for any thing which might interest or be of use to her. It was through some acquaintance of his that a rumour came of Mr. Weir having been seen somewhere in France—in Paris I think it was. John said nothing, but he made inquiries, and at length he found out an English gentleman who had lately

been in company with Mr. Weir, but knew nothing of his history, or how he was living, or what he meant to do—only that he had with him a Lieutenant Macdonald, who at that time was upon the point of starting for England. "Mr. Hervey is clever enough," continued Miss Milicent, when she had reached thus far; "and he put two and two together, and made out at last that the Lieutenant Macdonald mentioned in the letter was the same who is now at Dene; whereupon he wrote to me to tell me,—a very civil letter it was; not at all putting himself forward; he is a young man who knows his place, and does not interfere. But when I had read it, I made up my mind I would just go over to Dene myself, and see Lieutenant Macdonald, and hear all he has to say. I may as well take in some fresh air for strength before," she added, as she turned round to the wind, thrust her hands into her coat-pockets, and opening her mouth, drew a long breath, as much I am sure to help her mind as her body.

I did not dare say I felt for her. She never would have borne that, so I remarked quite coldly, "It would be more proper for Lieutenant Macdonald to call upon you, Miss Milicent. No doubt he would be quite willing to give himself the trouble."

"I don't know what is proper or what is not, Ursie Grant. I have lived long enough, and seen folly enough, to put propriety out of the question."

"But it would have been easier for you to have seen him at Stonecliff," I observed. "There are such odd people sometimes at Dene."

"If they are odd they are more like myself," she replied; "and I'll tell you what, Ursie, you don't know anything about it. There is Matilda Temple, at Stonecliff, with eyes and ears in every corner of the house; and my mother's door locked against me and open only to her. No! whatever I learn shall be by myself, without her interference."

"Of course you know best, Miss Milicent," I replied, "but it would not seem to me that Mrs. Temple was likely to interfere in anything which concerned Mrs. Weir; she could have no object in it."

"Then you don't know her, Ursie, and you are an innocent baby, which I never thought you before, for you never

gave a truer warning than when you said we had better not make one with Matilda Temple."

"It was you who thought so first, Miss Milicent," I said. "You always told me you distrusted her."

"And so I did, and so I do. How I ever came to give way to her I can't think. I do believe, Ursie, we don't any of us know in the least what we are like."

There was more thought in the remark than I quite saw then. I answered, indifferently, "I suppose we can't know till we are tried. But things won't last long as they are, Miss Milicent. I think you told me one day, that Stonecliff was only taken for a year."

"And what is to happen to us before the year is over? It is only just begun, and if we go on at the rate we are going now, we may be without a penny before it is ended."

I felt uncomfortable when Miss Milicent said this. I did not think I was the person to hear about the money affairs of the family, but Miss Milicent was so strange; she could be as close as possible at times, but if the impulse once seized her, and she felt confidence in the person to whom she was talking, everything came out at a rush. I looked towards the white gate to give her a hint that we must hasten on, but she never took hints.

"We were to share housekeeping," she continued, "but —I don't know how it is, I am sure—I have no means of ordering matters, and there are so many little things put down to my mother. I don't believe she wants them, but Matilda says she does. Matilda boasts she keeps within her own income; if she does it must be by eking it out with ours."

"Perhaps," I ventured to say, "if there is news of Mr. Weir, it might be the occasion of making a change."

"I don't say, perhaps," she replied. "I say it must be; only Matilda Temple will work, and work, at my mother to prevent it. Now she has her in her hands she won't let her go easily, you may depend upon that. That was why she wanted me not to show Mr. Hervey's letter. It was all pretence saying it would upset my mother. We had a regular battle about it, and I told her a bit of my mind. We are not the better friends for that. Depend upon it, Ursie, it is a trying life we have of it;" and, for almost the first time since I had known her, I heard Miss Milicent sigh.

It was her own doing, all to be attributed to her neglect of her mother, which had paved the way for Mrs. Temple's influence, but it was not my place to reproach her with it; and, I fancied she was beginning to feel it.

"Mr. Richardson talks to me about looking after my mother," she continued; "he is always throwing me back when I want him to give me more parish work. I don't see what business he has to interfere. As I tell him, he can't know the ins and outs of a family. My mother wouldn't have me with her if I wished it."

"I am sure Mr. Richardson means kindly," I remarked, "whatever he may say. He has been a good friend to Roger and me, at least."

"Well, of course, yes! and I dare say I may be wrong, but that won't mend matters now; and, Ursie, I don't like your always taking side against me."

I only laughed a little; there was no good in arguing with her or contradicting her. Besides, time was getting on. The sun was sinking low, and already there was a yellow gleam over the bay, and a mist gathering behind the white cliffs.

"If you please, Miss Milicent," I said, we really must be going on. Jessie has to return to Hatton, and you will find it lonely walking back to the Heath. Are you quite sure you had not better wait, and call at Dene to-morrow?"

"I am quite sure that, if it must be night before I am back, I will see that Mr. Macdonald to-day," she exclaimed. "Since you are like the rest of the world, Ursie, you can go your own way. That young girl and I can manage without you."

She strode on for some distance, and had nearly reached the white gate, when she stopped, turned round to me as I was following her, caught hold of my hand, and grasped it with the firm clutch, I can call it nothing else, which was peculiar to her, and said, "I am like a hack-horse tired, Ursie. Every one is setting at me to go their way, but you will forgive."

She would not wait to hear what I had to say in answer, but, pushing open the gate before Jessie could do it for her, she entered the grounds of Dene.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Dene was very little altered. I could not tell whether I was more glad or sorry for that. It would have been a great pain to see the old familiar walks destroyed; but then, to look upon them with such changed associations! I wondered how Miss Milicent could bear it. She went on bravely, and, as it seemed, carelessly, only I don't think she allowed herself to look about much; and she did not speak a word, but walked before us by herself.

Jessie, pleased to show her intimacy, said she should run round by the verandah, and tell Mrs. Price we were coming. Miss Milicent and I went to the carriage entrance.

A footman, in very gay orange-coloured livery, opened the door, but he was almost immediately followed by Jessie. I thought she was going to put herself forward to welcome us, but she had better tact than people would have given her credit for, knowing her thoughtless ways. She came up to Miss Milicent, and said, "I thought, Ma'am, perhaps you would like to know that Mrs. Price has a visitor with her."

"Thank you; I shall not keep Mrs. Price more than a minute. Ursie, where are you going?" and Miss Milicent looked back after me.

"If you have private business with Mrs. Price, Miss Milicent, I could wait here very well," I said, in an under tone.

"Private, with her!" was the answer, in a loud whisper. "You know I am not come to see her."

"You had better let your mistress know that Miss Weir would be glad to speak to her," I said aloud to the servant, for I was resolved that Mrs. Price should not think I had called upon her for my own pleasure.

"The dining-room is empty, I am sure," said Jessie to me; and the man took the hint, and ushered us in. I can't say how uncomfortable I felt; it was so very awkward to be there, and I could not see why Miss Milicent had insisted upon it; only, I suppose, she disliked the visit, and thought that I should help to make it go off well.

Jessie was very nervous and excited. She went out into the passage to see if the visitor was going,—then came back and stood at the door,—then looked out of the window. Her eyes were constantly turning from one side to the other, and every little noise made her start. For myself, I was really thankful to have my thoughts occupied by her and Miss Milicent. To sit in the dining-room at Dene, and feel myself a visitor to Jane Shaw, would have been more than I could have borne patiently, if I had had leisure to think of it. Presently there was a loud talking in the passage, some very hearty good-byes were exchanged, and then the dining-room door was thrown open very wide, and Jane Shaw,—I beg her pardon, Mrs. Price,—in a splendid figured green silk, rustling with stiff lining and flounces, sailed into the room. As for being introduced, there was no need of that; she was at home with us directly.

"Good afternoon, Miss Weir; very glad to see you. Mrs. Weir is pretty well, I hope?—How d'ye do, Ursula?"

She was not the least altered. In spite of her handsome dress—her hair beautifully plaited according to the newest fashion—her rings, and chains, and bracelets—she was Jane Shaw still. Little Jessie Lee was ten times more attractive, and Miss Milicent in her rough coat and beaver bonnet much more like a lady.

Miss Milicent's reply was abrupt, as might be expected from her, but there was a curious kind of civility in the tone which I was not used to—it seemed to throw one at a distance. I wondered whether Jane felt it.

"My mother is as well as usual, thank you. I ought not to have come so late; I must beg you to excuse it, but I have business with a gentleman staying here."

"A gentleman, indeed! We have a good many gentlemen here, haven't we, Jessie?" The poor child coloured crimson.

"I wish to see Mr. Macdonald," continued Miss Milicent. "If he is in the house, perhaps you would let him be told that I am here?"

"Lieutenant Macdonald! I can't say. He went out this morning. He may be returned. The gentlemen are not to

be reckoned upon in this shooting season, as Jessie knows." She added in a familiar tone. "Perhaps dear, you would just see if the Lieutenant is in the book-room?"

I rose and looked into the library myself. A man dressed in a shooting-jacket was lying full length upon a sofa. His face was handsome but the expression very disagreeable. It was Lieutenant Macdonald; I just knew him by sight, and Jessie Lee in contrast with him seemed to me like an angel.

"Mr. Macdonald is there, I think, Miss Milicent," I said, as I drew back from the door; "Would you wish to go in?" and I made room for her to pass, yet in such a way as to prevent Jessie from being seen. Mrs. Price followed to introduce her.

I closed the door behind them, and we heard only the low murmur of voices.

Then I went up to Jessie. "Promise me one thing," I said, hurriedly, "that you won't stay here, Jessie; that you will come home to Sandcombe with me."

She hesitated. "You must," I continued; "you don't know what you may be led into."

Mrs. Price's hand touched the handle of the door—I was in agony for the answer—I don't know what possessed me, but I added, "What shall I be able to say of you to Roger?"

Jessie's countenance changed in an instant. She looked at me with a winning smile, and said, "I will do what you wish. I should not like to vex Mr. Roger."

I kissed her. She seemed to me like a child saved from danger. Immediately afterwards, Mrs. Price burst in upon us. She could not have understood how or why I was there; indeed, I should have had a difficulty in explaining it myself. But she was very gracious; most unpleasantly so. "You find the place altered since you were here, Ursula," she began. "We have just added a room to your cottage, and enlarged the billiard room; you had a small parlour, I think, and the kitchen. I dare say you would like to go over and see it, and you would like to see the drawing-room, too, no doubt—Captain Price has put up some pictures, and made it look quite different from what it was in poor Mrs.

Weir's time. Our groom lives in your cottage; it just does for him and his wife, and they have one child. I will show you the way, if you like it. Jessie, dear, if you'll just run up to my room, and fetch my shawl—not the silk one, but the cashmere—I shall be obliged to you."

Jessie looked proud of the commission, and hurried away, whilst Mrs. Price took me into her drawing-room, professing to show me the pictures, but pointing out also the new carpet, and curtains, and tables, and chairs, everything in fact which could in the least display her wealth, and continually repeating, "We have been obliged to make such changes. The old furniture did well enough for poor Mrs. Weir, I dare say; but it wouldn't suit us."

I could never have been very cordial to her under any circumstances, and now every word she said jarred upon me, and presently, when she began to talk of Jessie, I was more than jarred, I was provoked. "Jessie was such a sweet girl," she said, "she was quite glad to have the chance of being useful to her They saw a good deal of company, and Jessie had many admirers. When she was well dressed, there wasn't a prettier girl anywhere round the country. No doubt she would marry well."

I made but a short answer; if I had said all that was in my mind, she might have thought me jealous; but looking out of the window, I observed, "that we must be thinking of going; Miss Milicent seemed likely to be kept some time, and though we had walked over to Dene together, we were to return separately. Miss Milicent had asked me to come with her, because she was a stranger."

"Oh! indeed! I didn't understand. I wasn't aware why I had the honour of a visit." Mrs. Price's manner was peculiar. I could not tell whether she felt pleased or displeased at having the acquaintance renewed. Jessie brought down the shawl, and we went over to the cottage. Mrs. Price reminded me again how small it was, and only fit for the groom, and tried to impress upon me that she was a great lady, and I was no lady at all; and yet she asked me questions about Sandcombe, and every now and then hinted that of course I should come and see her again. I let her talk as she liked, not professing to be equal to her in worldly

position; it did not distress me to be put down by her, my only difficulty was to keep myself from looking down upon her for other causes. But that which was more in my thoughts than anything else was, what could be done with Jessie. If she were to go with me to Longside she would be in the way; but I did not choose to let her walk to Hatton alone, and still less could I bear to leave her at Dene. It seemed to me as though she had been providentially placed under my care, and that I was responsible for her. I could not tell what to decide. We went into the cottage, and spoke to the groom's wife, and I looked round upon the old familiar walls with an eye that in fact saw nothing. I could have sat there for hours and thought, if I had been alone, but I had no feeling whilst Jane Price was at my side. Only for one moment, whilst she, and Jessie, and the woman, were talking apart, the present seemed to vanish away like a mist, and the past was all before me. Roger in his arm-chair, the table set out for tea, the kettle standing on the hearth, so cheerful, so peaceful!—Oh, what a pang shot through me! Would such days ever return again?

Miss Milicent came out of the house just as we were returning to it. A burning spot flushed her cheek, and she rushed up to me. "We will go now, Ursie; are you ready? Mrs. Price, I am sorry to have interrupted you," and Miss Milicent made a wonderfully polite bend. "I wish you good evening."

The words were not thoroughly articulate, they came out so fast, and Miss Milicent hurried on up the hill, whilst I vainly tried to overtake her, and then looked back, and to my dismay saw Lieutenant Macdonald issue from the house and join Mrs. Price and Jessie. I returned to them directly, but not before a few words had been interchanged between Jessie and Mr. Macdonald. "Please be quick, Jessie," I said, "Miss Milicent is gone."

Jessie looked at me, half doubtful, half frightened.

"Come," I repeated, decidedly. "I must follow Miss Milicent."

"You were not going with her; I don't know what you mean," replied Jessie; and Mrs. Price turned upon me hastily, and said that Jessie was intending to stay with her.

"You promised, Jessie," I said.

"Promised, what? She is engaged to me," exclaimed Mrs. Price. She began, I am sure, to suspect my motive for interference.

Mr. Macdonald had withdrawn a few paces, and I took care that he should not have the opportunity of addressing Jessie again, though what she had already said had been, evidently, in no way pleasing to him. Jessie herself seemed so irresolute, that once more I was induced to use the weapon of persuasion which I had tried successfully.

"You know, Jessie," I said, "you told me that you did not wish to vex me nor any one else." I stressed the last words, and saw that she understood them. She made a confused excuse to Mrs. Price, a half curtsy to the Lieutenant, and we followed Miss Milicent up the hill.

I breathed freely when I found myself outside the white gate; yet the relief only lasted for a few moments. I felt so provoked with Jessie for her weakness; so annoyed at having my engagement for the evening interfered with; so anxious too, for Miss Milicent, who was still striding on at a man's pace before us.

I kept Jessie's arm within mine, but without talking to her. Really I did not know what to say. After a few moments I looked at her, and saw she was crying. My heart softened towards her then; I said, gently, "You are not sorry you kept your promise, Jessie, are you?"

The tears only came the faster for the inquiry. I repeated it.

"I didn't keep it," she exclaimed. "I can't keep anything or do anything that's right, Ursie; you had better tell Mr. Roger so at once, and then he will give me up as good for nothing."

Her thoughts were dwelling then upon Roger. I noticed it, but it did not strike me as unsafe or unwise. It was like the feeling of a child for a parent.

"Neither Roger nor I will give you up, Jessie," I said, "not for all the world. But if you don't want to run the risk of making yourself miserable for life, you must keep out of the way of temptation. Dene is not a fit place for you. Jane Shaw wasn't over careful in her conduct as a girl, and

she is not any better, that I can hear, now that she is married; she has very few women friends, and the men are a bad set, as you quite well know, and it would just be ruin to you in all ways to be mixed up with them."

I waited for her to assent, but she only said, after a moment's pause, "Then Mr. Roger wouldn't like to see me married."

"Yes, he would like it very much," I answered, "if you were to marry respectably; so would all who care for you."

"I don't believe that any one who is respectable, as you call it, will ever take up with me," exclaimed Jessie. "If Mr. Roger thinks I have a bad name, so will others."

She longed for me to contradict her, I am sure, but I would not do so just then. She was out of conceit with herself, and wished me to say something civil that might put her in again; but though I was very sorry for her, I was certain it was good for her to feel that her careless ways had done her harm in people's opinion. Besides, I had no wish to go on talking about Roger. I felt I had not been wise in saying as much as I had about him. Jessie was so fond of being talked about, even in the way of being scolded, that it only increased her vanity to remind her that any one was anxious about her, especially a person whom she so much respected and looked up to as Roger. I cut the conversation short by saying that I must run on and have a few words with Miss Milicent. That, however, was not so easily accomplished. Miss Milicent had walked on so fast that I could not overtake her, and when I began to consider, though I thought it very strange in her to go off from me in such a sudden way, I saw it was no business of mine to thrust myself upon her. Instead of following her, therefore, I came back to Jessie, and proposed that we should both make the best of our way to Sandcombe. How disappointed I felt at losing my visit to Longside I can't say; and I thought how they would be expecting me, and once or twice was sorely tempted to go there after all; but it would never have done to take Jessie; it would quite have cut up our evening. If I had wished to have any talk with Mary I must have left Jessie alone, or burdened Mrs. Kemp with her, and that I should have disliked extremely, for she was not over pleased, as I

well knew, with the character that Jessie had gained for herself. One has no right to put people together till one is tolerably sure they are willing to be friends.

Moreover it was not a fixed engagement at Longside. I was always obliged to say I would come if I could, but they must not expect me for certain. I could never answer for what might happen with Leah to detain me at home.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A storm of hail came on just when we were off the Down, which made me the more glad that I had decided to return. It had been gathering for some time, but I had not noticed it much, having my mind given to other things. It would have drenched us thoroughly long before we could have reached Longside, and I should have been sorry for this, more for Jessie's sake than my own. I was strong and able to bear all weathers; but Jessie was of a weak constitution and often taking cold.

"They will be just sitting down to tea, Jessie," I said, as I took her up-stairs to my room, that she might leave her bonnet and shawl there; "they will be surprised to see us."

Jessie was disinclined to go down; she looked pale and tired, and proposed to wait where she was till the hail was over, and then walk to Hatton. But this I would not hear of. She could sleep, I said, very well in my bed; and one of the farm boys who lived at Hatton, would carry a message to say where she was. "I am sure, Jessie," I added, "that whenever you are at Dene, Mrs. Morris doesn't expect you back till she sees you, and so she won't be in any fright about you, knowing that you set off with the intention of walking there."

Jessie blushed but made no answer; and a fear crossed my mind, that perhaps she was in the habit of paying visits to Dene oftener than her friends knew. I could not bear to think it of her, for she was true by nature, though sometimes inclined to keep things back from fear. But vanity and love of amusement will lead to so much evil, which no one has any idea of at first.

I left her to go and explain to Leah why I had returned; but when I entered the parlour I found no tea prepared,—not even the tea-tray put out,—and the room looked so cheerless! The fire had gone out, and some one had been trying to re-light it; for a few sticks were lying about, and the coal-scuttle stood in the middle of the room. I went to the kitchen, and found no one, but I heard voices in the distance, loud and angry; they came, I was nearly sure, from the dairy, and I went there to see what was going on.

It was so dark that I stumbled over something which was lying on the ground at the door; it was like part of a broken dish, and my foot went into a pool, whether of milk or of water I could not see. Leah and Esther were in the dairy. They did not perceive me; Leah was in what I can only call a towering passion, a thing rare for her; she was bitter and cross, but not generally passionate. I heard my name mentioned. "Miss Grant lets you do it, does she? You are not to attend to Miss Grant, you are to attend to me, I am your mistress. But you'll leave me; I don't keep good-for-nothing girls, who tell lies!" And then Esther rejoined, not very respectfully but very earnestly, denying that she had said anything which was untrue; and was immediately contradicted by Leah with fresh threats of being turned off instantly. What was the beginning or likely to be the end of the quarrel, I could not see; but I was quite sure that Esther had been kept at work later than was right, and that she would have a long dark walk over the hill by herself, if some one did not take thought for her; so I quietly drew back, and made my way into the farm-yard, and told Sam Hobson, Kitty's father, whom I knew I should find at work there, that he was not to go without having a word with me first. He was a steady man, and lived near the Smithsons, and I was sure he would see Esther safe home. Then I went back to the dairy. Leah had left it, but I found Esther sobbing at the door. She told me her grievance. She had washed the milk-buckets carefully, as I ordered her, and cleaned the ladles, and prepared everything for the milk when it was brought in; and she was going to scour the pans that would be wanted the next morning, when she was called away by Martha, and sent on a message across the

fields, which took her more than a quarter of an hour. When she came back she found some milk, which had been put into a brown pan, spilt, and the pan itself broken to pieces. She had no more to do with it, she said, than I had; and she went directly and told Martha, but Martha didn't believe her, neither did Mrs. Grant. No one else, they said, had been near the dairy, and it must have been her doing; and so they wanted to make her confess it. "But I wouldn't tell a story for them, nor for the Queen!" exclaimed Esther, indignantly. "I didn't do it, and if they were to cut my head off, I wouldn't say that I did."

There was one point, however, in which Esther no doubt was wrong; it was part of her usual carelessness; she had been always told to shut the dairy-door when she came out, and this had been forgotten. But she owned it at once. She was a thoughtless girl, but not given to falsehood. I had no doubt myself that the mischief was done by the cat, and I made her fetch a candle, and we went into the dairy together. I pointed out the marks of the creature's feet on the boards; Esther was satisfied then, she thought the trouble was over. As for the threatening, and the scolding, she had been used to them from one or the other all her life, and I doubt if she considered it possible to get on without them. She had learnt to look upon herself as fated to do wrong. As she once said to me, "Please, Miss Grant, I was born to go crooked."

I was very provoked with Leah in my own mind for having raised such a storm, without having given herself the trouble of inquiring into the case, but I supposed it would all be right when once I explained matters. I did not understand Leah, however; perhaps I should more truly say I did not understand human nature. There is no saying how far we are all at times tempted to depart from what is just, from the shame of allowing that we have been unjust. When I went in, Leah was kneeling down before the parlour fire trying to re-light it. Esther had brought damp sticks, and they would not catch; the shavings were burnt out, and there were only a few scraps of paper to use instead.

"It was too late to get to Longside, Leah," I said, by way of explanation, "so I am come back. Can't I help

you? There's a 'Weekly Messenger' in the drawer which I suppose may be used."

"You'll please let that stay," was the reply. "There's an advertisement in it which William wants to have kept. It's all that girl's fault—green sticks like these! They won't light for a twelvemonth." Leah caught up the match-box, rubbed her last match, and found that it wouldn't go off, and then tossed the box upon the table, and sat down in William's leathern arm-chair with her arms folded. I went out to the kitchen, and brought back some more shavings, and another box of matches. "Certainly," I said, as I gathered up the green sticks, "it is very tiresome. There are plenty of dry faggots in the wood-house, I know."

"This sort of thing won't go on," said Leah, not at all hastily, but in a tone which to me was much worse.

I made no reply.

"I shall go over to Compton to-morrow," she continued, "and tell Mrs. Richardson so. I can't have liars in my house. They will look a long time before they see any more of my money for Compton school, if that is the way they bring their girls up."

I was afraid I should only irritate her more by answering, but I could not hear a false accusation without trying to put it right, so I explained what had really been the case about the milk. All I gained in reply was, "Very likely; it might be true, or it mightn't; but Esther was a girl who wasn't to be trusted. She could not even lay a fire. She never remembered a thing that was told her; and if she didn't break the dish herself, she was the cause of its being broken, and that was just as bad. So impertinent she was too,—and such a quantity of milk spilt,—Mrs. Weir must go without it, there wouldn't be a drop for her,—old customers must be attended to first." These and many more remarks, equally annoying, I had to bear in the best way I could, and that I thought was silently; but silence only made matters worse. When Leah found herself uncontradicted, she turned her wrath upon me. It was all my doing, I was at the bottom of every mischief: it was I who had insisted upon taking Esther; I, who had taught her badly—indeed, had entirely neglected her. If I could have believed her, my

love of going about visiting was the cause of the mishap in the dairy, and the green sticks, and the extinguished fire.

I was not unaccustomed to such accusations. I went on trying to make the fire burn, and by the help of the bellows succeeded at last, so that the room was quite cheerful with a blaze; and then I set out the tea-tray, and brought in the bread and butter, and put out some cake for William, Leah all the time not taking the least notice, but sitting moodily apart. At length, when she found she could not get a word from me, she went up-stairs.

I give no credit to myself for forbearance. It was simply a matter of necessity. If I had said one word I must have said a hundred. I was, in fact, so angry, that I could not trust myself to speak. Perhaps, with such a violent temper as mine was naturally, and a principle of religion which had not, as it were, come to its full growth, this was as much as I could expect. But it would have been better if I had learnt to turn my wrathful feelings into prayers. I might not then have heard all the bitter things Leah said, and I am sure I should not have treasured them in my heart as I did. I went up-stairs to find Jessie, and gave vent before her more than I ought to have done, and that did me no good, especially as Jessie was inclined to take Leah's part, partly, I think, because she felt vexed with me for not having flattered her more.

After a while, I sent Jessie down to explain for herself why she was there, and to make tea if she was wanted, and presently I heard her talking away quite cheerfully to William. I could not make up my mind to go down myself, but there I sat close to the window, looking out upon the heavy clouds which came floating across the sky, tinged with a faint glow from the sunset. I was better in some degree, for I had tried to pray for a few moments when Jessie left me, and my temper was quieter; but I could not forget what had passed, and my thoughts were gloomy as the deepening twilight. Mrs. Price, Leah, Jessie, Esther, all seemed going the wrong way; some from one cause, some from another. And there was no way of doing good. I thought I was to be useful to Esther, but she was to be taken away from me. I wished to save Jessie, but she depended upon Leah more than

upon me. I had cherished a hope, when I came to Sandcombe, of persuading William, if not Leah, to look upon things in a different way, but I did not see that I had the slightest influence. William was not at all more constant at church because I went twice. He took the Sunday afternoons for settling the accounts just the same, and never read anything but the "Mark Lane Express" or the "Hove Advertiser;" and the way things went on about the farm and the servants was not altered in the least. My life seemed quite thrown away. And as to my own temper and principles, I had only to look at myself at that moment and see all the angry, proud, revengeful feelings which were struggling for the mastery, to be quite sure that there was very little improvement in them. If I had only remained with Mrs. Weir, I said to myself,—and I went off in thought into a consideration of what might have been the consequence, both to her and myself, when Jessie ran up-stairs to bring me down to tea, saying that William was tired of waiting.

Leah was not in the room. Tea was poured out, and she did not come; and, when William went up to her, he brought back word that she had a headache, and was lying on her bed. William was in very good spirits, rather merry than otherwise. He was pleased to have Jessie there, and joked her about Dene, and especially, to my great annoyance, about Lieutenant Macdonald. I rather imprudently carried on the subject, by repeating what I had heard of him, and especially of his habit of drinking; and William, really, I believe, for the mere amusement of contradicting, took his part, and made light of it, saying that it was what all young men would do if it came in their way, only some had the cleverness to conceal it. I was sure, and I told him so, that he was wrong. I don't believe that either Roger or John Hervey ever did such a thing, and William himself was always sober from a boy. It vexed me that he should say such things before Jessie. It is so bad for any one to have a low opinion of others; and moreover it has always been a puzzle to me, how persons can talk lightly of such a habit as Mr. Macdonald's. Putting aside the evil in this world, the Bible always classes it with the worst sins. To hear a drunken scene turned into ridicule, is to me like hearing people laugh

about the devil. It makes me shudder. But then, the world would say I am over particular.

When Jessie went up-stairs to take Leah a cup of tea, I made a remark of this kind to William, and brought him to agree with me. I did not like to tell him how matters really stood between Jessie and the Lieutenant, but I said enough to put him on his guard, and make him feel that to encourage Jessie in thinking about such a man, was very unwise to say the least. There was something in William which I could always reach when I had him to myself. It was not goodness or principle, I am afraid, but it was a kind of straightforward sense and perception of truth. Selfishness blinded him whenever he did see things crookedly. The provoking thing was, that one never could depend upon him. He might agree with everything that was said one minute, and the next he would go and act directly against it.

Jessie, when she came down, said that Leah's head was very bad, and she thought she had caught cold standing about in the dairy; I offered to go up to her, but Jessie thought I had better not. She did not exactly say that Leah was too much put out with me to see me, but I was certain it was so. It did not strike me, however, that there could be much the matter, for Jessie told me that Leah had talked about a dinner party which she thought of giving the week after Christmas, and a card party had been mentioned too. Generally speaking but little visiting went on round Sandcombe, the farms were so scattered, William and Leah however always gave rather a grand party at Christmas-time, and Leah went out a good deal then, sometimes as often as twice in the week.

Jessie cared little for dinner or cards, what she wanted was a dance; but she could not bring Leah round upon that point, she said, and I own I was not very sorry for it.

We sat rather long gossiping over the fire after tea. When William went out to look round the farm, Jessie very good-naturedly offered to see to one or two things which I was in the habit of attending to, and left me at my work. But presently she came back with a note in her hand. It had been brought, she said, from Stonecliff, and the man was waiting to know if there was any answer.

"Let him go and warm himself by the kitchen-fire,

Jessie," I said, "it will take some time to read this; and perhaps you will just look out a pen and some paper for me, in case I should have to write." I drew the candle near and began to read. No spectacles were required; Miss Milicent's letters might have been distinguished from each other, half across the room :—

"I went away from you to-day in a hurry, Ursie Grant, but why did you not come after me? I expected you. There is a great deal to say to you; more than I can put on paper to-night. Lieutenant Macdonald was half-tipsy, I don't think he knew what he was saying. Come over to-morrow morning if you can, and if you can't, come to-morrow afternoon. Matilda Temple complains of the Sandcombe butter; I don't eat butter myself. My mother has had a bad nervous attack; Matilda Temple has been with her all the afternoon. As I said, she won't let her go to my father. I should like to know how much we are to believe of the news. I should not like to live in France, but it might be better than Stonecliff. Matilda Temple means to go and hear the school-children examined at Hatton to-morrow. It is not her parish, but it will take her out of your way, if you come over. If you hear of any one who wants sea-anemonies, you may send me word; I shall give mine away if we go to France.

"I am, Ursie Grant,
"Your sincere friend,
"Milicent Weir."

Not much of an answer could be given to this note, it was too perplexing; but I wrote because I would not trust to a message, lest there might be some fret with Mrs. Temple. If she knew I was likely to be at Stonecliff, she might possibly put herself in my way. I merely said, however, that if I possibly could, I would walk over in the course of the afternoon, but Miss Milicent must not be vexed with me if I did not come, for I could not answer for myself; and the man was sent back.

"Ursie," said William to me that night, when I went to

bed, "Leah has a terrible cold; what do you think I had better give her?"

I recommended something warm, but I did not offer again to go and see her.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

I WOKE the next morning with the feeling that all the business of the house depended upon me. I was dressed long before daylight, and down-stairs helping Jessie to get breakfast, because Esther came late. I went to the dairy, and fed the poultry, and gave the orders for the day, and I made the tea, and cut the bread for breakfast, and talked to William and Jessie, and arranged for Jessie to stay the day, because of Leah's being ill; in fact I did everything for every one, except myself. I was in a proud mood, and I would not get the better of it; "If Leah does not send for me," I said to myself, "she may just do without me."

Jessie declared she was very feverish. I asked if a doctor should see her, and William laughed at the notion. In the afternoon, before I went over to Stonecliff, I told Jessie to go up-stairs and let Leah know I was going. I thought perhaps that she would wish to see me then, for there had been some more trouble about the butter, and I knew she had a message to send. But Jessie only brought back word that I was to tell Mrs. Weir there would be no butter all the winter. It vexed me more than I would quite own to myself to go off and leave her, though it would be only for a few hours, without having had a word of peace with her, and the next day Christmas-day too, and I preparing for the Communion. I actually turned back, after I had reached the farm-yard gate, resolved to see her, but Jessie told me she was asleep then, so it was of no use, and I continued my walk.

Stonecliff was a much better house than the cottage on the heath. It had, besides, a good-sized garden, and a coach-house and stables. A tolerably large income would have been required to live there comfortably, for it was a kind of place which would naturally occasion expenses.

The garden gave most trouble, for the place lay quite open to the south-west, and the salt spray dried up the vegetation; but there was a glorious view to make up for it, all over the bay to the great white cliffs, and the far distant coast, which could be seen like a grey cloud on the edge of the sea; and the sound of the dashing waves, and the feeling of the fresh, free breeze, came to one with such a gift of life, and hope, and strength—in spite of its wildness, I could have been very fond of Stonecliff if it had been my home.

I found Miss Milicent in a little study, opening out of the drawing-room. She was drying sea-weeds; but said as I entered, without looking up from her occupation, "There's a chair for you, Ursie; I am glad you are come."

"I hope Mrs. Weir is better to-day, Miss Milicent," I said.

"She may be better, but she is not quieter."

"Was the news yesterday so very bad?" I ventured to ask.

She pushed aside the table at which she had been busy, and turning round to face me, replied, "Your name is not Weir, Ursie Grant, and you can't understand."

"Perhaps not, entirely," I said, "but no one can blame you, nor Mrs. Weir, Miss Milicent, whatever may be wrong."

"Listen to me, Ursie," she continued, and she leaned her clenched hand on the table, and bent forward with eagerness. "I had to talk to that man yesterday, and he was not sober, and he called himself our friend, the friend of the family, and he wanted to shake hands—who was to bear that?"

"He was not the more your friend for calling himself so," I replied.

"But he is," she added, bitterly, and she walked away suddenly to the other end of the room. "You are an honest girl," she added, returning, and placing both her hands on my shoulders. "You won't think lower of us because our name is Weir; I was proud enough of the name once," she added, in a lower tone.

"Indeed, Miss Milicent," I said, "you know well enough that it is an honour to me to do anything I can for you. You have only to tell me what. I am very sorry you were

so annoyed yesterday with seeing that disagreeable man, but perhaps you won't have to do it again."

"I shall though, Ursie. I must go there again. There is a great deal to arrange with him. He knows all my father's concerns."

The veins in her forehead swelled as she spoke the words. I gazed at her in surprise. Such proud feelings I had never remarked in her before, and yet I could scarcely call them proud. In her place I should have felt as she did, and not blamed myself. Mr. Weir had once been a gentleman, honoured and respected. She could never forget that.

"Mr. Richardson, or Mr. Temple, would see him for you," I began; but she interrupted me.

"No, Ursie, no spies, no strangers, none but his daughter shall hear of him. And I couldn't talk to any one but you," she added, as large tears coursed themselves down her cheek.

Poor thing! Words can't express how sorry I felt for her, but I could not understand why she should choose me to talk to. It came out, however, very soon.

"You know all, Ursie," she said, "the difficulties and tempers; my mother's ways, and Matilda Temple's; you understand it. I can't go and tell Mr. Richardson every thing; and I trust you, Ursie; I trust you with all my heart."

I gave her my hand, and she grasped it heartily.

"The trouble is about helping him," she continued. "This man says he wants money, and that he is going to join in a business—wine-selling, I think; but I don't put faith in what is told me; only he declares, my father is so poor now, if he could have help he would go on steadily. What does Lieutenant Macdonald mean by steadiness?"

"You must not trust Lieutenant Macdonald," I said. "If Mr. Weir is found, some one else must go and see him, and judge what is really the state of the case."

"And who?" she exclaimed. "My mother?"

"Oh, no! Miss Milicent, never. How could you think of such a thing?"

"Then I? By myself? Leaving my mother with Matilda Temple? I have thought about it."

For the moment it seemed the only plan. Yet for her to go abroad alone, it was next to impossible, and I said, "You would not trust Mr. Temple, I suppose, Miss Milicent?"

"Trust a baby in long clothes! Ursie, where are your senses?"

"John Hervey!" I exclaimed, as with a sudden inspiration.

She sat down, and leaned her head upon her hand. I heard her murmur to herself, "He knows him; he can't think worse of him."

"John Hervey knew Mr. Weir years ago, Miss Milicent," I said. "He would respect and help him for the sake of those old times."

Her countenance worked with a conflict of feeling; but presently she said, quite calmly, "If he could go he must be paid."

"His expenses must be paid," I said. "He would give his time, I am sure, if possible."

"Matilda Temple holds the purse-strings," observed Miss Milicent.

I was silent—that subject was beyond me.

Miss Milicent sat lost in thought; her cogitations seemed to come to no satisfactory termination, for, after a silence of at least five minutes, she said to me abruptly, "You will go up-stairs and see my mother, Ursie. She knows you are here. Not a word about plans remember. Under any circumstances she can't go."

I left her. My suggestion would, I knew, work better in solitude than if I was with her; and with a slow step, very different from that with which in former days I had been accustomed to seek Mrs. Weir's presence, I went up-stairs and knocked at the door of her sitting-room.

"Come in," said the gentle voice, which always sounded more sweet to me than any other. "Oh! Ursula, it is you! How are you? Will you sit down?"

Mrs. Weir pointed to a chair, and then turned away her face, and I saw her take up her handkerchief to wipe away the tears which filled her swollen eyes.

I longed to go near her, and show that I was sorry for her, but I could not make the first advance. I could only say, "Miss Milicent tells me, Ma'am, that you have had a bad night."

"Rather disturbed, Ursula. I never sleep well now. I

thought I should have done well to take a sleeping-draught before I went to bed, but my niece did not like it."

"You used to take it occasionally, Ma'am, if I remember," I said.

"Yes, occasionally; it is a very bad habit. My niece says I ought to cure myself of it; and she never takes such things herself, though she is very nervous, and lies awake half the night."

A pause followed. Not knowing what to say next, I remarked, without thinking what I was saying, that I was afraid Miss Milicent had a cold dark walk, the last evening. She was out so late,

"Milicent is always out late," replied Mrs. Weir. "She is away all the day. I don't see her, I only see my niece, and no one ever comes to call, except Mr. Richardson, and he has not been to see me so often as formerly."

"Perhaps your friends don't know you would like to see them, Ma'am," I replied.

"Perhaps so, Ursula; but people change. I did not think they would. I thought if they loved me once they would love me always. But we are not to put our trust in human friends; my niece tells me that."

"But indeed, dear Ma'am," I exclaimed, rather hastily, "I don't know where we are told to distrust them."

"I do not remember any verse, Ursula," replied Mrs. Weir, quietly; "but God teaches us by experience; only it takes a long time to learn the truth."

"I hope it will take a very long time before you learn to distrust me, dear Ma'am," I said; "if I might be so bold as to consider myself your friend."

"Did I say distrust, Ursula? I did not mean it; but young people go away and forget, and we ought not to expect that it should be otherwise."

I could not help understanding this, and yet I did not know how to take it up.

Mrs. Weir continued, still in the same mournful tone which was her nearest approach to anger, "My niece has sent some messages to Mrs. Grant, Ursula, about the butter, but I dare say you were too busy to attend to the orders."

"What orders?" I could not remember any, and I said

"It does not signify, it will do no good to vex ourselves about such trifles," added Mrs. Weir. "I told my niece that I did not care about it. I was only sorry, Ursula, because I thought you would have managed it for me, but I am sure you could not help it; I was only hurt for the moment;" and she held out her hand to me kindly.

Just for an instant I thought I would try and explain, but any one who had looked at Mrs. Weir would have seen that explanation upon any subject then must be useless. Even this little fault-finding had put her into a state of nervousness, which was quite painful. I could only take her hand, as she offered it me, and say heartily, "Dear Ma'am, you will never understand how things are till I can come back and stay in the house a little, and look after you."

Her sad face lighted up with such a bright smile for a second, but it clouded again, and she said, gravely, "Oh, Ursula, if you ever came to live with me I should want you to speak quite plainly, and tell me everything, and you would not like that. You know you did not like to tell about the little broken chessman."

I felt stung to the quick; that she should remember that trifle, and take it up so wrongly too! It must have been dinned into her ears every day, or she would surely have forgotten it long ago!

Mrs. Weir saw that I was vexed, and with her usual impulse of kindheartedness, tried to do away with the effect of her words, by reminding me how well I used to nurse her, and what a comfort I had once been to her. But she could not deceive me. I felt chilled, and I confess I was unjust to her. I forgot her weak health, and the ease with which a person in her state may be worked upon, and attributed the misunderstanding to fickleness. "I am afraid, Ma'am," I answered proudly, "that you can have but little pleasure in the company of a person whom you suspect of not speaking the truth, so I had better go." I stood up, intending to wish her good morning, but she looked at me with an earnest, even an imploring gaze, as she said, whilst every limb seemed to tremble with agitation, "Then, Ursula, you do not care for me any more than my other friends do."

I caught hold of her hand and kissed it. "Dear Ma'am,"

I exclaimed, "Indeed I don't understand you. Nobody cares for you more than I do, if you would only believe it, and not listen to the unkind things which are said against me. Who could help loving you?" I added.

"Ah, Ursula," she replied, and her lips quivered, "people have left off loving me since I came to Compton. My niece knows the world, and she showed me that my friends cared for me when I lived at Dene; but they have left me now. I ought not to mind it. I have my niece, and she is very good to me. She says I shall never go away from her; but, Ursula, do you know," her voice sank, as she looked timidly round the room, "we have had news—news of my husband—Mr. Weir. Do you not think I ought to go to him? Do not answer loudly; they hear sometimes."

"There is no one to hear now, Ma'am," I said quickly; "but I think, if you will let me say it, that you had better not trouble yourself about Mr. Weir just now. You can wait till you learn more about him, and then by and by you can go if it should seem right."

"By and by," she repeated; "yes, soon, that would be; if my niece would allow it. But I ought to go, Ursula, I am his wife, only Mrs. Temple thinks it wrong. I shall tell her what you say."

Poor lady! all her old loving confidence in me was returning, and as I perceived it, every remaining feeling of annoyance on my side vanished. I sat down again, I felt I might comfort and soothe her, and I was happy. But the door opened, and Miss Milicent entered.

"Mother, have you finished talking to Ursie Grant?" she began.

"Do you want her, Milicent? I shall be sorry to say good-bye. She is so kind in coming to see me."

"There is no time to spare, Mother. Matilda Temple will be back directly. I must have you, Ursie."

"Matilda is coming now, I think," said Mrs. Weir.

No one else had heard the footstep, but Mrs. Weir was right.

Miss Milicent beckoned to me. "Come, Ursie, come, we are better out of the way."

"If you please, I will wait and see Mrs. Temple," I replied, for I was resolved not to be abashed by her.

There was a pause on the staircase; Mrs. Weir's old feeling of restraint seemed to have returned. She said nervously, "Good-bye, Ursula; you will come again some day, when you have time."

Even she then wished me to go, and I went. I passed Mrs. Temple in the lobby, and received from her a bend of the head, so slight as scarcely to be noticed. A feeling came over me as though I had left Mrs. Weir in the hands of a gaoler.

"I have settled, Ursie," exclaimed Miss Milicent, as she led the way to the study, and closed the door behind her. "I won't be indebted to any one, I will go myself."

I could not tell what to reply, and Miss Milicent added, hurriedly, "Don't object; I can't bear objections."

Few people can, I thought to myself; but the scheme was mad.

"I shall go," she continued. "I know a person who will go with me, an old servant. She has been in France; she travelled with us eight years ago. I shall talk to Lieutenant Macdonald again; perhaps he may be more sober. I must go, Ursie. I must have my own way."

Who would doubt that? Miss Milicent ought to know more of the difficulties than I did, but they crowded upon me. It seemed an expensive plan, taking two people instead of one. I doubted if Miss Milicent would know how to help her father when she was with him. I believed that such matters of business required a man's head to arrange them. I thought that to leave Mrs. Weir was giving up a first duty. I was sure that trouble would follow if Mrs. Temple was allowed to go her own way so entirely without check. But Miss Milicent was totally undisciplined; whatever she took into her head must always be carried through; and at the bottom of the decision there lay—I don't believe she saw it, but I am not the less sure that it was there—the desire to escape from a wearisome life, the struggle of conscience, and contact with Mrs. Temple. Any duty rather than that which was at hand.

I believe it is so with us all at times.

I continued to put in my word of advice, and that rather boldly. "Miss Milicent," I said, "you do not know under

what circumstances, or in what company, you may find Mr. Weir; it may be very unfitting for a lady to go where he is."

She would not hear me. It was all nonsense, she said. Where there was a will there was a way. She didn't know what fear was, and as for the opinion of the world, she cared not a whit for it. That very afternoon she should write to the servant, and inquire wether she could go.

I had nothing to offer in reply. I could but say that I hoped she would consider the matter well before she decided upon it. She disliked the appearance of opposition, and when I proposed to leave her, she was glad that I should go.

Something seemed to strike her just at last about her mother, for as I was going away she said, holding my hand, and speaking very earnestly, "You will be near, Ursie, if my mother wants anything; and you won't mind Matilda Temple's humours."

It was a satisfactory thought to Miss Milicent, but it was anything but satisfactory to me.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Instead of going home over the down, I went round by Hatton, and up the stony lane. It was a long walk, but I had a little shopping to do in Hatton. In the grocer's shop, I met Mr. Hervey. I told him where I came from, and that I was on my way back to Sandcombe; and he offered to walk with me. He had been over to Hatton on business of his own, but he was going back to Longside, to be present at the giving away of a loaf of bread to all the families who lived in Farmer Kemp's cottages, and to all his labourers and boys. It was an old Christmast-eve custom; and there was to be a dinner for the labourers the next day, so there was enough to do at Longside; and Mary, I heard, was very busy, and very provoked with me for not having gone to her the evening before.

All this was told me as we walked slowly up Hatton lane; but John Hervey had something else in his mind, and I had something else in mine; and yet we neither of us liked to

speak of it. He could not tell me of his private news about Mr. Weir, and I could not tell him of Miss Milicent's plans, though I knew he would be likely soon to hear of them. We were much more silent than usual, and once or twice I cut him rather short in something he was saying,—not meaning it, but merely because I was thinking of other matters. It never struck me that he might notice my manner, till we parted; then he said in a marked tone, "We used to be great friends, Ursie, and have a good deal to say to each other,—but somehow times seem changed."

My colour came, not because I was angry, but ashamed. I really had never regularly made up with him since the evening we had that little fuss about Mrs. Weir and my interference.

"I didn't think you had a memory for old grievances, Mr. Hervey," I said, laughing a little awkwardly; "I am sure if there is a change it is not in me."

"There are no grievances, Ursie," he replied, more gravely than I expected; "only if I am a friend once, I am a friend always."

"And so am I, I hope," was my reply; "we are making a great deal out of nothing, Mr. Hervey."

"Yes, it is nothing," he said; "nothing to you, Ursie. There is no reason why it should be anything else. Good-bye, I didn't mean to say anything disagreeable."

He held out his hand, and I shook it very warmly, for I liked him heartily. But he was cold-mannered still. I told him to give my love to Mary, and to bring her over to see me as soon as he could. But he made no promises, and it rather provoked me to see him so odd and moody.

He could scarcely have left me more than two or three minutes, when I heard a voice calling behind me, "Ursie, stop! Ursie, why don't you stop?" William was coming after me.

"What is the matter?" I said, turning round slowly.

Instead of answering me, he asked quickly, "Who was that with you?"

"John Hervey," I replied; "look, he is going along the down now;" and without another word, William was off like a shot. I thought it strange, and waited to watch what

would pass between them. William overtook Mr. Hervey in a few seconds; then I saw them talking together in a great hurry, and to my surprise, John Hervey changed his path, and was away towards Compton in less time than I could have thought possible.

William rejoined me. "He's gone for the doctor," he said; "it was better than my going. Ursie, she is desperately ill!"

"She!—who?" I exclaimed; whilst all the blood in my veins seemed chilled, and my heart for a second stopped beating.

"Leah!—Haven't you heard? It is worse every hour."

"It!—the fever!—I didn't know she had any!"

"You have not been near her," said William, bitterly. "It was coming on when you went off this afternoon."

I said not a word for myself. If he had told me I had killed her I should have acquiesced.

"Jessie has been with her," continued William; "we should have sent for you, but we expected you in every instant."

"I wish with all my heart you had sent!" I exclaimed. "I could have been back nearly an hour ago. But—I don't understand—it was a cold, nothing else."

"Nothing else that you knew," said William; "but I thought it wasn't all right this afternoon myself; and if you had been there, I should have made you go to her. Jessie is such a child, she is not fit for anything. The fever has the upper hand now, she is wandering."

"Leah is always feverish when she has a cold," I said. "She may only be a little more so than usual."

"You can judge for yourself," was William's answer, and he did not say another word as we hurried across the farm-yard and into the house.

I rushed up to Leah's room, drew aside the curtain, and looked at her. William was right; she was desperately ill.

I need not say what that evening was like. How in a few hours the whole aspect of a house may be changed by the presence of serious illness almost all know by sad experience. It was as though every person's business had been suddenly put an end to, as if indeed it was unfeeling for any one to

attend to anything. William sat brooding over the fire, Jessie ran up and down-stairs on useless errands, Martha gossiped with the men about "mistress's illness," and Esther Smithson, whom I had kept to sleep at Sandcombe, thinking she might be wanted, was ordered to do all which no one else had time for.

And I—I don't know what I felt,—I believe I was thankful to be busy. There was a heavy load at my heart which would otherwise have been unendurable.

No neglect had I been guilty of intentionally. No suspicion of real illness, much less of danger, had for an instant crossed my mind when I left Leah that morning; but I had given way to a proud temper; she had done me wrong, and I had waited for her to apologise, instead of taking the first step towards reconciliation myself. I had allowed the "sun to go down upon my wrath," and to rise upon it again, and the ill feeling had kept me from her. I might not indeed have been of use to her. Her husband was the person responsible, if any one was to blame, for not having sooner perceived the serious nature of the illness; but I could not be innocent in my own eyes, nor, as I could perceive, in those of William and Jessie.

John Hervey came back with the doctor from Compton, and when he heard that it was a serious matter, he proposed to ride over himself to Hove for further advice. William hesitated, but I urged it; I was resolved there should be nothing more to reproach myself with. John went, and was back again with a second doctor before eleven o'clock. Then he offered to stay all night—and I should have been thankful to keep him, he had such a quick thought and ready hand in times of difficulty—but William objected, for he liked nothing that put him out of his ordinary way; and hiding his face from danger, tried to forget that it existed.

I sat up with Leah, alone. She did not know me; in her delirium she complained of me, and thought I was treating her unkindly. Once she called out for me, and said I would not come near her. The fever increased; I expected nothing better; the Hove doctor had talked of nine days before the crisis; he was not sure, but he thought it likely, and I summoned up my courage to bear the suspense. Such

anxieties are scarcely dependent upon affection. I did not love Leah, but I could have willingly taken her place, and been in her danger to save her.

Morning dawned, that freezing dreary dawn which belongs to the depth of winter, and Jessie stole into the room to beg that I would go to rest. But I turned from the thought of rest; and when she took my place at the bedside, I went down-stairs to give the men their Christmas breakfast of ale and toast, the only relic of the old customs in my mother's time.

They were respectful and sympathising in their manner, and I felt myself among friends and was cheered; but when I left them, I heard their jokes go on as though nothing was amiss. It was Christmas-day to them. It was no day to me until, as I stood for a minute at the open window of my own room, I heard the peal of the merry bells of Hatton church. Then a better feeling came over me, and I knelt down and prayed God to forgive me in whatsoever I had done amiss in my intercourse with Leah, and to spare her, and raise her up again to live from thenceforth to His glory.

CHAPTER XL.

It was not the will of God that my prayer should be granted. Nine days afterwards, and Leah was dead. In that short period I had lived as it seemed through years; for I had gazed upon death, and faced the terrors of Eternity.

I cannot write about it minutely. At the time I was in a troubled dream. Looking back, I can feel nothing but wonder and thankfulness at the Mercy which sustained me through the trial. For all was left to me from the beginning. William was at first stunned. His wife had been in many ways unsuited to him, she had given him many hours of vexation, but he was used to her, and understood her; he had taught himself to depend upon her; and the thought of being left alone filled him with unspeakable dreariness. When she was gone, he went about his daily business, but I saw

him often turn from the empty parlour, and sit down within the wide hearth in the kitchen, and cry like a child.

People told us we had one great comfort, that after the first everything had been done which could be; and it was true. No money had been spared to give her doctors' advice, a nurse had been hired that she might never want attention, Mr. Richardson had called every day, and prayed for her when he could not pray with her, and at the end, when consciousness came back to her, there was the comfort of knowing that he had done all he could to make her prepare for her great change. But I could never forget the beginning of her illness, and if she had not before the last, said, "Good-bye, Ursie," and looked at me kindly, I think I should have been broken-hearted.

Yet I did not dwell so much upon her, I felt I must trust her with all her faults, all her short comings, to Him who alone knew her heart, its trials and struggles, but rather I turned with a bitter self-distrust to my own position.

Who was I that I should venture to rule others, when conscience told me I had so little rule over myself? When for the first time I sat at the head of William's table, as the acknowledged mistress of his household, it was with a feeling very different from that which had led me to criticise Leah's arrangements in other days. I had continually failed in humility, in gentleness, and charity. I had obeyed,—but from necessity, not from a willing heart, and the first qualification necessary for those who would govern well is the power of obeying well. It seemed as though it were meant to punish and humble me, that all my duties presented themselves in confusion,—one interfering with another, my own will and William's perpetually coming in contact, and claims from without, and anxieties from within, pressing upon me, so that there were moments when I felt inclined to sit down with my hands folded, and let others take their way, merely because I had not the spirit to try and make them go mine.

It was about a fortnight after Leah's funeral—that painful time succeeding a great shock, when we try to look upon the present and the past as one, and find that God has placed a great gulf between them, which in this world can

never be bridged over—I thought I would steal a few moments of quietness to think of all I wished to do, and to alter the arrangements which in Leah's time I had found fault with, and said that if I were at the head of affairs they should be different. These were many; some, of course, more important than others, but all requiring consideration and contrivance.

The men and boys who slept in the house were left entirely to themselves. They were placed together in an old part of the house, reached by a staircase, which led to the women-servants' rooms as well. So there was no one to look after them.

I had heard through Martha that they were often very profane in their language, and that if a boy, fresh from school, with good habits, knelt down to say his prayers, they would mock him till he gave up the practice. I had spoken about this to Leah; I had told her that at least she ought to take Martha away from the risk of such company. But I was always put off with a laugh at my particularity, as it was called. What had done very well for the Sandcombe servants for thirty years, I was told, would surely continue to do for them for thirty years to come. This was a thing to be remedied at once, and yet I was met instantly by a difficulty as to fitting up what was now a lumber room, for Martha, and so bringing upon William expenses which he would consider unnecessary. Sunday was another burden upon my mind. Martha never went to church in the morning, so that she had no opportunity of receiving the Communion, even if she had wished it. I had several times offered to remain at home myself, but she would not hear of it. I could do as I liked now, but if I was not at church, I was sure William would never trouble himself to think about the men or see if they were there. In fact he was very irregular in his own attendance, remaining at home on the least excuse, and I had strong suspicions that the men often took advantage of this, and went to public houses, and got into bad company, on a Sunday. It was impossible for me to be at home and at church too, and wherever I was, I seemed compelled to leave something neglected. As for Sunday reading, the men, if they read at all, followed Wil-

liam's example, and spent their time in spelling over a newspaper. I thought I might do something to help in that way by bringing them together, and asking Mr. Richardson to lend me some interesting book to read to them, but I was very ignorant, and shy too, and fancied I should never have courage to begin, even if William were to allow it, which was doubtful.

But the thing I had most set my heart upon was having family prayers. They were managed at Longside, and I earnestly desired to have it so with us. In the morning, indeed, when the men were all out in the fields, only Farmer Kemp's own family and the in-door servants could attend; but, in the evening, all who slept in the house met in the room where the maids sat, and where most of the needlework was done; and then Farmer Kemp regularly read a chapter in the Bible, and had prayers. I remember hearing him describe the difficulty he had in beginning the practice, and how the men only made a mock of it; but he persevered, and now there could not be a more well-behaved congregation in a church, than that which met at Longside every evening.

But Farmer Kemp was master there, and had all his family on his side. William was master at Sandcombe, and would be entirely set against the notion. The fulfilment of my wish seemed a great way off, and I had but few things externally to help me in the meantime. Sandcombe was so far from Mr. Richardson, and from Compton Church, that I could gain but little comfort from them. I saw Mr. Richardson every now and then, but I could not go to him to talk over my every-day difficulties; and as for church, I could very seldom go, except on Sundays. The services were too early and too late, and the utmost I could hope was to manage the walk occasionally, on the saints' days, when there were prayers and a short sermon at eleven, and when I might have business to take me to Compton.

Perhaps the improvement which I had the greatest chance of carrying out, was as to the outward behaviour of the men who worked on the farm. Both William and Leah had a great notion of being respectable, and anything which created a scandal, or made people talk about them, was dreaded. And

yet they would often keep men about them whose characters were known to be bad, and who did untold mischief to others. This arose, in a great measure, from Leah's indolence, and William's dislike to face anything disagreeable. There were one or two men about whom I had heard things which made me urge William to rid himself of them; but he never would inquire into the stories, and Leah always said that the men were not her concern, and so they worked on, and every day I was sure that they were doing harm, especially to the women and girls, who were often employed in the fields, and heard their bad language, and saw their evil ways. Once, when there was a press of work, and a lack of hands, it was proposed to send Esther into the fields, but I managed to prevent that myself. I felt that I was in a certain way answerable for her to Mrs. Richardson, and I could not bear to think of her being corrupted by such company.

It struck me that if I could only inquire, and find two steady labourers to take the place of those whom I wished to turn off, I might, without much difficulty, bring William to agree to it, and this would be the beginning of what I hoped might at length prove a great amendment.

I sat alone, as I before said, planning all these changes, when I was interrupted by William. He was accustomed now to wander into the house many times in the course of the day. No particular business brought him, but he was restless,—always thinking to ease the burden at his heart by change. Just at first, I thought that he had come at the right moment, and I was upon the point of opening out my wishes to him, but I remembered how he disliked changes, and I knew, too, that old governments are very jealous of new ones, and so I thought I would delay, or, at least, sound my way before I made any propositions. And it was fortunate that I did, for I should surely have met with opposition. He was bent upon an arrangement of his own. Poor fellow! he wanted the appearance of a settled state of things, even if he could not have the reality, and he was come to make a proposal to me, he said.

I did not like the sound of the word, but I answered: "Anything, William, by which I can be a comfort to you, you know I shall be very glad to do."

"It would be comfort for yourself too, Ursie," he said, "you know you have your own living to get in the world, at least there is little enough for you without, and you may just as well make your money with me as with anyone else. I would give you a fixed sum by the year, and you might be able to put something away out of it."

So strangely blind we are! It will scarcely be believed that up to this moment, I had never put before me the fact, that Leah's death might be the means of separating me from Roger for ever.

My heart seemed to rise up in my throat and choke my voice.

William thought I was touched by the feeling of the great change which had come over us. He said to me kindly, "It would be the best thing for us both, Ursie. We understand each other, and shall get on very well together. Things can't be as they were, but we must make the best of them."

"And Roger?" I exclaimed.

"Oh! Roger will marry," was his careless answer; "he is sure to marry in that out of the way country."

I rose up, and turned away my face from him, whilst I held up my work to the window under the pretence that I could not see to thread my needle, though in fact I only wanted time to recover myself. I spoke to him after a few seconds, I think quite calmly. "It is very kind of you, William," I said, "to wish to make a fixed agreement that shall continue, but it might not be quite wise. Only as long as I stay with you I should be very much obliged for an allowance, because now that I have to look after everything, I can't give any time to needlework."

As the words came from my lips, I felt how cold they were, seemingly ungracious and unthankful, and William longing, as I could see, for something to turn to and be fond of. I tried to make them better. I said he was always kind to me, that I was sure we should manage very well if we had to be together. I turned my sentence in the way I thought most likely to please him, but I could not say what I knew he wished to hear. "William, it will make me happy to live with you."

He was a proud man, and shy, as proud men often are.

He was thrown back by me, and he could not make a second advance. "You shall do as you like, Ursie," he said, "I don't wish to put constraint upon any one. I thought it would be wise to place things on a regular footing, but if you like better to continue as you are, living as it were from hand to mouth, why you must please yourself."

No, this was not at all what I liked. I must have things put on a regular footing, as he called it, if I was to remain with him; but the sacrifice which this might involve, I was not prepared for.

"William," I said, "you must let me think this over by myself. We are all in a bewilderment now. I don't think we either of us know what we wish or want. A month hence we may tell better."

He looked at me for a second, tried to whistle as he used to do when half angry and half astonished, broke off abruptly in the middle, and went away.

As I ran up-stairs to my own room, I heard him giving some orders in a loud, strained voice, and then I saw him walk off with long strides across the fields.

CHAPTER XLI.

I had greatly pained William, and at the very time when I was most anxious to give him consolation. But how could it be otherwise? Was it possible, was it in any way to be expected, that I should entirely sacrifice my own happiness for the sake of being what, after all, could only prove a secondary comfort to him?

This was the question which I put to myself, when I was once more alone, in my own chamber, with my door bolted, and kneeling before God that I might be the better able to answer it in all sincerity.

Time was passing on rapidly, in a very few months I might expect, if not to see Roger in England, at least to receive my summons to Canada. Was I to say "No" to it? Could I leave Roger to face loneliness in a distant land? After all he had done for me, would it not be selfish, ungrate-

ful, to draw back and allow him to toil on, away from home, friends, every early association of happiness, to fall ill perhaps and die, and none to comfort him?

I wept most bitter tears as I conjured up the spectre of the evils which might be lurking in the dimness of futurity. But there was another side to the case. Roger was young, healthy, and full of hope; likely, as I had so often been told, to marry. He had not gone to Canada for me, but for himself. If he sent for me, it would be because I had no home but his. The tie between us was voluntary. If I were called upon to break it by a stronger claim he would be the first to give it up.

And William was my brother also, an elder brother, suffering from a grief which Roger had never known. He had a household dependent upon him, and no one to manage it; duties incumbent upon him, which, without help, he would find the utmost difficulty in fulfilling; and he had been kind to me when I most needed it, he had taken me into his home when I had no other home. If I had not been happy there it was from no intentional neglect on his part. He might be a selfish man, but he was never deliberately unkind. Could I put aside his claim as slight? It was the revival, in another form, of the difficulty which had so greatly troubled me when I left Dene; but it touched me more closely, for it was a question of separation, not for a year, but, probably, for ever.

God forgive me if I found the cross He had laid upon me too hard to bear; if, for a while, I again pondered the case, striving to escape from the decision of my conscience, and convince myself that Roger was to be my first consideration, and that it was less a question of my own wishes, than of the comparative happiness of my brothers. I was young then. I had made a duty to myself of my affections, and I had not learnt that, unless supported by the claims of the work set before us by God, affection is not a duty but a temptation.

Before I had in any way reached the end of my deliberation I was called down-stairs to speak with John Hervey. I had not seen him since the day of the funeral, but I had been expecting him constantly. He seemed now so much a

part of ourselves that I was comforted at the thought of talking to him, though I did not feel that I could ask his advice.

"How is it with you to-day, Ursie?" he said, kindly, as I entered the room, "and how is William?"

"William is rather better," I replied. "He is in the fields looking after the men. Do you want him?"

"I can't do him any good, I am afraid. Time will do that, through God's help; but I have a letter for you, Ursie."

"A letter!" I jumped up and caught it from his hand. He turned away as I opened the seal.

"Dearest Trot,—I send you some hearty good wishes for Christmas-day, as I am writing to John Hervey upon a little business. You shall hear more soon. Lots of thanks for your last letter; nothing keeps a man up like hearing from home. We have had rather a bad time here. Mr. Pierce has been very ill, and is so now, and I have been good for nothing myself. Please God, though, we get through this winter, we shall all be better off next. John will tell you about my work. I have not time for more. God bless you always my little Trot. From your very loving brother,

"ROGER GRANT.

"Love to William, and Leah, and all friends."

I let the note fall upon my lap, and burst into tears. John Hervey drew near, frightened. "Is it ill news?" he said, "there was nothing particular in mine, except about Mr. Pierce."

I could not answer him, my tears came so fast. Perhaps it was the careless mention of Leah's name which had opened the flood-gates of my sorrow.

John took hold of the note, and I put it into his hand to read.

"He has been ill," was the only remark he made upon it, "but he tells me he is better."

"He is not better," I exclaimed passionately, "I know what he means by putting things in that light way. I must go to him, and nurse him. He is nothing to you, Mr. Her-

vey, but he is my all—my all!" I repeated; and it gave me a kind of fierce pleasure to feel that there was nothing in the world I loved like him.

"Perhaps you would like to see my letter," said Mr. Hervey; "there doesn't seem much amiss from that, as far as Roger is concerned, though I should be afraid about Mr. Pierce; and you see he says that if anything were to happen to him, it might be a great draw-back."

I seized the paper almost without thanks. I would not let Mr. Hervey read it to me. There was a pleasure in letting my eyes rest upon the letters which Roger had formed. I waded through two pages of farming business, understanding nothing: then I came to a few words about himself, less than what he had said to me. I found no comfort in them.

"He doesn't complain," said John.

"He never does," I replied.

"Spring will be coming soon," he continued, "the worst will be over."

"And winter will be coming again," I answered, "but he won't spend it alone."

"You are bent upon going to him then," said John, in rather an anxious tone.

"I am not only bent upon it, I must do it."

"I thought you might have stayed a little while with William," continued John. "He will be much put to without you."

I shrank from the suggestion. "William will get a housekeeper," I said; "and Roger wants me, and I promised him to go."

"And you wish it?" said John, and his eye rested upon me, with an earnest gaze, which for the moment puzzled me.

"Yes," I exclaimed, "of course I wish it. Who is there that can be to me what Roger is? Who took care of me when I was a child, and gave me a home, and watched over me, and taught me? It was not William, Mr. Hervey; you know that as well as I do. If he had been all I had to depend upon, I might have been at this time working for my bread in service, or starving upon dress-making. If William wants me now, it is for his own good, not for mine."

"There is certainly more gratitude due to Roger," said

Mr. Hervey. He stressed the word gratitude. It fretted me.

"Gratitude!" I exclaimed. "No, Mr. Hervey, it is not gratitude. I am grateful to Farmer Kemp, to Mr. Richardson, to you, to any one who has done me a kindness. I have something more than gratitude for Roger."

"Don't trouble yourself to be grateful to me," he said, gravely.

I scarcely heeded his words: "You can't understand," I exclaimed; "no one can."

"Yes," he replied, in a tone of singular calmness, "I can understand. You love Roger better than any one else in the world."

"I love him better than my own life," I said. "I would be thankful to sacrifice every hour of my existence to him. I wish for nothing better than to live with him always. There are many kinds of love in this world, Mr. Hervey, I don't see how we are to measure them. I only know that a sister's love for a brother may make earth a Paradise. Dene was my Paradise," I added, in a lower tone.

I did not look at John Hervey as I spoke, my gaze was riveted upon Roger's letter.

When, however, John said, touching the paper, "May I have it?" I gave it to him reluctantly, and then raising my eyes, I was for the first time struck with the expression of his face. It was strangely pale, and there was a look in it as though it had been cast into a mould; a kind of stony look. I did not like to ask him what was the matter. As he folded up the letter, he said to me abruptly; "I came over for another purpose. Miss Weir is going to France; I suppose you know it."

"I had heard of it; I did not know it was a fixed plan."

"I hear that she has engaged a servant, and has had directions from Mr. Macdonald."

"Miss Milicent is mad!" I exclaimed.

"Not far from it. She leaves her mother to Mrs. Temple's care."

"It will be safe care," I said.

"It may be," he replied.

"I saw he was too proud to ask me again to interfere in

any way; and I smiled and said: "You want me to look after Mrs. Weir, Mr. Hervey, but you won't say so?"

"My wishes are not likely to weigh much with you, Ursie, I know;" was his reply: "but if Miss Weir goes, Mrs. Weir will be left without a friend."

"Mrs. Richardson," I said.

"She will be left without any friend," he repeated. "Mrs. Temple keeps her to herself."

"But she likes it."

"Perhaps she does, I can't say; but she seldom sees any one. Mrs. Richardson is constantly denied admittance."

"For what purpose?" I exclaimed. "It can do no harm to any one."

"You women are strange beings," he replied; "you are all fond of power."

"Because you men give us so little of it," I said; "what is rare is always precious."

"Oh, Ursie!" he exclaimed, and he caught hold of my hand; "you have a great deal more power than you know, —if you were only able—"

"To do what?"

"To use it rightly,—kindly, I mean."

I laughed a little, and said, I would come to him for instructions. It seemed odd that I could laugh. I was not in the least happy in the depth of my heart; but laughter lies on the surface. We had some more conversation after that about many things. John told me little about Miss Milicent that I did not know, except the fact that her journey was actually settled. She had not come to him for any help, he said; she had gone entirely her own way. I suppose it was her pride, and the consciousness that her friends disapproved, which prevented her from consulting any one; nothing else that I can imagine, would have induced her to have frequent interviews with such a man as Lieutenant Macdonald. He, it seems, besides telling her where Mr. Weir was, had given her some instructions as to her journey; and this kind of business had taken her frequently to Dene, where Mrs. Price made a great deal of her. So strange it was that Miss Milicent could bear it! But I have lived to wonder at nothing I see in the way of intimacies. All in-

dulged faults bring us sooner or later to humiliation of some kind. Miss Milicent's self-will and pride made her take rather a pleasure, I suspect, in going contrary to the opinion of the world. She thought she showed her contempt for it in this way; but we do not take trouble to oppose what we despise. I don't mean by this that Miss Milicent was intimate with Mrs. Price, but only that she bore to meet her upon a footing of equality. I inquired anxiously about Mr. Macdonald, and was thankful to find that he was to leave Dene in a few days. Our late trouble had put thoughts of Jessie out of my mind, but they were returning again, with the more force, because I felt myself to be in a measure, holding Leah's place. Jessie had written a refusal, so she assured me; I did not doubt her word, and yet I had a lingering misgiving. The one thing which Jessie could never be made to understand was, that she had no right to indulge her vanity, by having a double mind in these matters; she might refuse Mr. Macdonald, but I was not at all sure that she would not continue to flirt with him, and of course in such a case a refusal would go for nothing; especially as I had reason to believe that Mr. Macdonald sought Jessie for something besides her beauty; it being confidently believed by many people, that Mrs. Morris was very rich, and meant to leave Jessie a good sum of money. I was so anxious to hear of his departure, that John promised to let me know as soon as he was gone. I believe John thought I only wished him away, because of his interference in Mrs. Weir's affairs. We separated after having been together more than an hour Just before John left me, I said, "You are going to write to Roger?"

"Yes," was his reply; "and so are you." He went to the door, came back again, and added: "Ursie, we don't always see things rightly when we have a strong wish."

I knew that better perhaps than he could tell me. When I found myself alone, I took a sheet of paper, and wrote a long letter to Roger, telling him that I must give up all hope of joining him at present. How I had arrived at the conclusion, I don't know. I believe it was through contact with an honest mind.

CHAPTER XLII.

If William and I had in the least understood each other, we could never have gone on as we did during the next few weeks. We were both very unhappy, but if we had explained the cause of our unhappiness we must inevitably have quarrelled and separated. As it was, we lived lives apart, but without disagreement. The very absence of anything like real sympathy enabled us to avoid the subjects which would have jarred, for we kept upon the surface of all things. In my self-conceit, believing that I had more thought, intellect, and principle, than Leah, I imagined at first that I could eventually fill her position, even in William's estimation, for his love for his wife was by no means an overpowering affection; but I was soon convinced to the contrary. As there is "a time for every purpose under the heaven," so I believe there is also a place for every person. The great man cannot fill the little man's position; self-sacrifice cannot make up for the absence of congeniality. Not that I was great, nor that my life was one of self-sacrifice. I only used the expressions by way of illustration. Leah's likings and dislikings, her pleasures and pains, even her temper and fancies, were part of William's home associations; and therefore necessary to him. I believe I actually fretted him by trying to make no complaint of the servants, nor to say sharp things of my neighbours. The watchfulness which I was striving to acquire was stagnation to him, and I was too sad at heart to be able to cheer him by talking much upon other subjects. I had Jessie Lee with me whenever she could be spared, as much for William's sake as for my own. The meals and the evenings were so quiet and silent, I was thankful to have some one to bring forward new subjects of conversation, and Jessie was generally bright and amusing in her way, and seemed glad to be with me. She was not, however, in her usual spirits, but that could scarcely be expected, for she was very affectionate, and felt Leah's death extremely. Whether there was any other cause of melancholy I could not make out. As to Stonecliff, there was still the same

talk, week after week, of Milicent's going abroad, but the journey was always put off. When a woman will follow her own fashions, instead of those marked out for her by the common sense of others, it is surprising what a mine of difficulties she is likely to sink into. No one without seeing would have believed the fancies which Miss Milicent gave way to respecting her French journey; whims about her boxes, her dresses, which way she was to go, how she was to guard against the weather—it was as if she was the first person who had ever crossed over to France. She took it into her head to come frequently to Sandcombe, under pretence of asking me what I thought about her plans, but not in the least meaning to listen to what I said. She took up a good deal of my time in that way, but I did not care so much for that. I had always a very kindly feeling towards her, but what I did dislike was the frequent mention of Lieutenant Macdonald's name in Jessie's presence. There is nothing like talking of people to keep up an interest. Even if disagreeable things are said, it helps to retain them in one's recollection, and gives one a kind of interest in them; and Miss Milicent of course could not always be complaining of the Lieutenant's habits and character. Most frequently she spoke of him in reference to some information he had given her, and then I saw Jessie colour up, and listen eagerly. Once or twice, too, Miss Milicent had taken Jessie over to Dene with her, because she said she liked a companion, and this kept up the Dene intimacy; and, moreover, at last, Mrs. Price actually came and called upon me, pretending she was bound to return the visit I had paid with Miss Milicent. I could not understand that in the least, until John Hervey put me up to it. "Mrs. Price," he said, "is not noticed by any of the country gentlemen's families, and, as she finds Dene dull without company, she falls back upon her old friends." I was not flattered by the reason, but it did not trouble me much. I was not bound to return the visit, and I never did.

It was March before Miss Milicent was ready to set off on her expedition. Up to that time I had only twice been at Stonecliff, and then had not been permitted to see Mrs. Weir. I had tried, however, to show that I thought of her,

by sending her little presents of fresh eggs and vegetables. I hoped she had them and knew they came from me, but Miss Milicent always seemed in a mist as to what was done with them, or indeed with anything which once entered the house at Stonecliff. The second week in March, as I was in the kitchen putting up a little basket of things to be left for Mrs. Weir by Esther Smithson on her way home in the evening, William came in from the fields looking very serious, and said to me, "Do you know, Ursie, I have had bad news. I can't make out whether it is quite true, but our Hatton boy says that Mrs. Morris is very ill. Have you heard it?"

"No," I replied; "and we should have heard it certainly. There can't be anything in it?"

"I should think not," he answered; "but Will declares that his father was sent off to Hove for Mr. Sutton."

"Suppose you ride over and see," I said; "it would be the shortest way."

William was of a perverse disposition; he never liked having things suggested to him. "I don't know about leaving the men," he replied; "they always go wrong when I'm away."

"Well, then, wait till they come in to their dinner," I said. "As for your own, they will give you some at Hatton."

"Not if the old lady is ill," was his answer. "There will be no one to get it."

"I could go myself, if you liked it," I observed.

He went to the window and looked out. "The clouds are coming up very stormy away to the west; you can't walk."

"But I could be driven," I said, "if you could spare Joe Goodenough for the chaise."

"Just what I can't do, as it happens. I have sent Joe Goodenough to Hove."

"Well, if it is so, we must even wait," was my answer. "Ill news flies apace, so if there is anything amiss, we may be sure it will reach us before night."

"Wait and get a character for unfeelingness all round the country," replied William. "I don't want to do that. I shall see about it. I suppose I must try and go myself."

He went off to do what I was sure from the beginning he

meant to do. I should have preferred going myself, for if Mrs. Morris was ill, I was more likely than William to be a comfort to her. But what he said about walking was very true. I should certainly be caught in a storm. The kitchen window looked to the west, and over St. Anne's hill and the reach of down below it the clouds were like ink. There was a driving wind, which perhaps might serve to keep the rain off for a time, but it was sure to fall heavily before many hours were over. I went out after William, to beg him to put on his great-coat, but he would not listen to me, though he shivered as he stood talking to one of his men, and said it was bitterly cold. I saw him set off, and warned him to make haste back; the sky looked more threatening than ever, but it tempted me to go to the top of the lane, that I might see it gathering over the sea. I walked by the side of William's horse, telling him to be sure and bring back word if Jessie was uneasy, and if I could be of any use; and after watching him across the down till he was out of sight, I stood still and looked round me. It was a glorious sight from the top of the hill. The waves were tossing furiously in the bay; the white breakers glittering for a moment, as the sun pierced the masses of clouds, and then disappearing beneath the heavy shadows which swept over the sea, covered the cliffs, and rushed across the land, like demons of darkness.

From infancy it had been a delight to me to watch a storm; even thunder and lightning excited far more than frightened me. The spectacle of the vast Power over which human beings had no control, raised my thoughts above earth. It was as though I was no longer the weak, ignorant girl, of no account even in the eyes of my fellow-creatures, but a being of a higher race, permitted to draw near and watch the wonderful workings of God's Wisdom. The feeling had been encouraged by Roger. Often, as we stood together in former days upon St. Anne's hill, when the rough winter winds were rushing past us, I have heard him murmur to himself the verses in the psalms which speak of "the Lord that commandeth the waters:" "the glorious God, that maketh the thunder."

The words came back to me now; and as I looked at the wild waves breaking upon the line of red shingles, I continued them aloud: "It is the Lord that ruleth the sea; the voice

of the Lord is mighty in operation: the voice of the Lord is a glorious Voice."

"Is it you, Ursie Grant?" said some one, tapping me on the shoulder.

"Miss Milicent! I beg your pardon; I didn't see you."

"How should you? I came from behind. What are you doing here?"

"Watching the storm," I said; "it will soon come to us."

"But not stay, I hope. I go to-morrow, Ursie."

"Not in such weather, surely!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, Ursie; I must be off anyhow."

"Oh! Miss Milicent, are you right?"

"I don't know; I must do what I have set my mind to do; and what does it signify, Ursie, storm or no storm, one shall reach the end somehow."

Her tone was so excited, that I turned to look at her with anxiety.

"When we do what is put before us, we needn't be afraid, I suppose," she continued; "and if the end cuts us short, it is God's will, and no matter whether it be by storm or fever."

"I should be glad, though, to feel that I was doing His work," I replied; "but that is the doubt to me very often, Miss Milicent."

She stopped before answering. "Do you often doubt, Ursie," she said, "really doubt?"

"Very often," I replied; "I think at the time I am right. When I look back I see I was wrong."

"That can't be a pleasant discovery," she replied, thoughtfully.

"No," I said; "but it has come upon me more frequently than usual of late. Death makes us think, Miss Milicent, whether we will or not."

"It is the end of the storm," she said, and a singular look of awe crossed her face. "Ursie, if I were never to come back, what should you say of me?"

An exclamation of pain at the idea escaped me. She stopped me short. "No matter for the thought, Ursie; I am not a bit nearer to it for uttering it. What should you say of me?"

"In what way, Miss Milicent?" I asked. "You have been a good friend to me always."

"Pshaw!" she exclaimed, impatiently. "What is being a good friend? I have not beaten you nor turned you out of doors,—that's all. Would you say, Ursie, that I had gone the right way through life?"

"I think you wish to go, Miss Milicent, as I wish it myself."

"I think you wish to go!" she repeated. "I don't think you have gone, that means. Ursie, you are a coward and a humbug like other people."

"It is not my place," I began—but she would not hear me.

"It is your place to answer my questions, if it is my will to put them. What does place mean, Ursie? Look!" and, as a large drop of rain, the beginning of the storm, fell upon her hand, she thrust it before me;—"God's warnings touch all alike; there is but one place before Him."

I was greatly touched by her earnestness. I longed to speak to her freely, but the difficulty I felt was insurmountable. As in so many other cases she had committed herself to a certain course of action, and now sought for approval. I was not the person to give her sanction or to condemn her.

She waited patiently; so patiently, indeed, with her large, fierce eyes softened by an expression of suspense, that the very consciousness of her presence took from me the power of thinking correctly. I really could not answer her; I scarcely knew, indeed, what she wished or desired me to say.

"Miss Milicent," I replied at last, "If you really want help in these matters, there are persons much more fitted than I am to give it."

"I don't want help," she exclaimed; "I want only truth. Good-bye, Ursie. I shan't get it from you."

"Oh! Miss Milicent!" I exclaimed, and I took hold of her dress as she turned from me; but she would not be detained. When she hurried away, I saw her put her shawl over her bonnet to shelter herself from the rain, which was beginning to fall fast, and as I turned to descend the hill, I lost sight of her completely.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Often and often, in looking back upon that conversation, I have blamed myself for not taking advantage of the opportunity afforded me of speaking freely to Miss Milicent upon the mistakes I felt she was making. And yet, if I could place myself again in the same position, I doubt whether I could bring myself to act differently. What is fitting is such a strong instinct in us all, unless we have been spoilt by education. Miss Milicent had no right to make me her judge and reprover; though, if she had waited but a few minutes longer, I think I might by degrees have felt encouraged to state my opinion more openly. As it was, I felt that she would throw upon me the blame of having been too cowardly to advise her. What had brought her to such a state of mind now I could only guess. She was coming from Compton; it was probable that some conversation with Mr. Richardson had made her angry, and yet touched her conscience. I knew through Mrs. Kemp, that from the beginning he had told her she was forming foolish plans by herself. Most likely he had been making a last effort to bring her to reason, and wishing to find some support for her own wilfulness, she had turned to me. I was uncomfortable when I reached home, and thought a good deal about her as I took my solitary dinner; but I was too busy afterwards to dwell upon the subject, except when the wind rose higher, and I remembered what she had said about the next day, and wondered whether she would still persist in her determination to go whatever might be the state of the weather.

There was one person, however, whom no press of business could drive from my recollection. We were expecting letters from Roger, the first that could have arrived since he had heard of Leah's death. I did not believe they would come that evening. They could not, unless some one brought them out from Hove, and I knew no one had been sent in; but the bare possibility agitated me. As the afternoon closed in, and the wind went down, and the rain turned first into sleet, and then into a heavy fall of snow, I drew my chair near the fire, waiting for, and expecting William's return; and whilst I worked busily with my fingers, occupied myself with

anxious thoughts of Roger in his distant Canadian home, and I am afraid with many other anxious and repining fancies, sufficient, if I had examined them, to prove to me that my own mind was far too undisciplined to allow of my attempting to discipline Miss Milicent's.

By half-past five it was so dark that I lighted a candle, which made everything beyond its own sphere darker. I wished William would come, and began to be afraid that he was really detained by Mrs. Morris's illness. When I listened for his horse's steps, I heard nothing but the low moaning of the wind, as it drifted the snow-flakes to the earth, and the solemn ground-swell, betokening that worse weather was at hand. I grew nervous at last. The candle flickered as draughts of air made their way through the closed shutters of the old windows, and then the shadows on the wall seemed to move, and I fancied the door was opened, and when I went to close it I caught, as I imagined, a murmur of strange voices by the front stairs, and stole along the stone passage to listen, and hear nothing; and made my way back again with the feeling that I ought not to be alone, that I must find some one in the parlour waiting for me—Leah used to be there.

I was ashamed of such fancies—I felt they were wrong. I thought I would read a Psalm to myself and chase them away, and I turned to that which had been so vividly brought before me on that very day. I read it aloud to myself—again I came to the words, "it is the Lord that ruleth the sea," when a sound struck me—a sound once heard, never to be forgotten—the faint but heavy booming of a gun—a signal from a ship in distress.

It was not unusual. There were many wrecks in the winter season. The coast had been known as dangerous, from the days when the old monks lighted their beacons on the summit of St. Anne's, and prayed that God would protect his servants in perils of waters. More than ever, I wished that William was at home; he would have sent off his men to the shore instantly, probably even he might have gone with them, for he was kind-hearted when roused by any urgent call. I did not like to take the responsibility of sending the men myself, and yet I could not endure the idea of sitting still and doing nothing, and, in my restlessness, I

went out to the front door to listen again. Another booming sound reached my ears. I could bear it no longer, and as the figure of a man at that instant crossed the yard in the dusk, I ran out to stop him. "I must speak to you," I exclaimed, "come in; do you hear the gun?" and I touched him, thinking to gain his attention. He made no answer. "Do you hear it?" I repeated. Still there was no reply, but he followed me into the house. I stopped at the door. There was a faint light in the passage from the fire in the kitchen. "Is it you, Joe Goodenough?" I said. The man laid his hand upon mine, and, as I started back, a voice, half-laughing, half-trembling with agitation, said, "Not Joe, my little Trot, but Roger!"

I don't think I screamed. I am quite sure I did not faint. I remember that I led Roger into the parlour, and took off his great-coat, and put him into the arm-chair, and sat myself down beside him, even as if we had been parted only for a few hours, and never till then asked him the question where he came from, and what brought him. Once with me and all seemed natural. He inquired hastily about William, and seemed very anxious to know how things were going on, and then he said, "Mr. Pierce is dead, Trot; I am come home at his last request. That is one thing. Poor Leah's death is another."

I knew all that was contained in the last sentence. He had thought of me. I answered, "There have been terrible changes. We feared Mr. Pierce might die."

"Yes, it has been a grievous business. He was not fitted for the climate or the work. I hope I was a comfort to him. But you have had a hard time too, my little Trot, my precious little woman." He seized me with his old bear's hug, and I felt tears drop upon my cheek; we could neither of us trust ourselves to say more just then. He had landed only that day, and had had little to eat. I went out to order something for him, and came back again to ask him about the ship; should any one be sent off? He satisfied my mind. As he came off the down he had met people going across. There would be sufficient help. The night was calm, though dark, and he did not think I need be uneasy.

Oh! the blessing of resting upon another instead of deciding for oneself. Women may like power, but I can never

believe that it is in their nature to like the responsibility which goes with it. I told Martha to get tea quickly, and would have gone away myself to hurry her, but Roger was just as he used to be, so patient about his own comfort. He should like a biscuit and a glass of wine, he said, and then he would wait till William came. We would have tea together. "Home faces are better than tea," he remarked, as he grasped my hand, and held it tight. "Oh! Ursie, there's nothing like Old England after all."

We spoke of Leah then. He felt so tenderly about her. I saw he could not reconcile himself to Sandcombe without her. His loving heart seemed to have no power of retaining disagreeable impressions of any one living, much less of the dead. To hear him talk of his old neighbours and acquaintances, even of the Shaws and Prices, one might have thought that they had been conferring favours upon him all his life.

People had been very kind to him in Canada, he said, and he had no doubt that if he chose to go back he should do well. But the necessary exposure to the intense cold during this first winter, and the anxiety about Mr. Pierce, had tried him greatly. The voyage home had done him good, and he was looking well, but this first experience of exile had not been quite successful. As he went more into details about his own affairs, I found that Leah's death had in some way affected his money arrangements with William, and there was a question about laying out his little capital in Canada, which could not well be determined until he had had a communication with William. "So you see I had more reasons than one for returning, Ursie," he said, "and as poor Mr. Pierce took care to provide me with the means, I thought I shouldn't be wrong, though I felt it was following my own wishes. I had a longing—"

"To see me," I said, as I looked up at him eagerly. He patted my cheek and laughed; but a grave look came over his face, and directly afterwards, he went on saying something about Leah. I knew as well as possible all that passed through his mind; it was what passed through mine likewise. We could not part perhaps for ever without one more meeting.

We waited till seven o'clock, and still William did not

come. I made Roger have his tea then, and in my happiness did not think of being uneasy about William, only I was impatient that he should see Roger. But when the clock struck nine, I did really think it very strange, and I agreed to Roger's proposal, that he should go up to the top of the hill and call out. The night was pitch dark, and the snow still falling, and in spite of William's knowledge of the tracks over the down, it was not at all impossible that he might lose his way. I could not help being amused at the contemptuous tone in which Roger spoke of the weather. "What was English cold?" he said, as I helped him on with his great-coat, but he knew how to wrap himself up uncommonly well, and went out pleased, I am sure, rather than not, at having to encounter his old enemy.

Not above ten minutes afterwards, I heard quite a chorus of men's voices in the entrance. William was there and Roger, and there were one or two others besides. But they were merry enough, and I was satisfied there was nothing amiss. The men went into the kitchen, William came into the parlour, blinking at the light, and putting a handkerchief to his eyes, but with his hand resting upon Roger's shoulder, and asking him more questions than could by any possibility be answered. "He was lost," said Roger, laughing heartily. "You would not believe it, Ursie, but he was."

"And frightened out of my senses when I was found," exclaimed William. "What was I to make of it, Ursie, when I heard a man, who I thought hundreds of miles away, hallooing close at my side in the dark? I would walk fifty miles, and be present at a hundred shipwrecks, before I would have such a fright again. But welcome for all that, my good fellow," and he shook Roger's hand till I thought it would have come off.

"Then there has been a shipwreck?" I inquired anxiously.

"A wreck, but no lives lost. Heaps of oranges for the Hatton people to feast on to-morrow, and plenty of salt water to give them a pleasant flavour. I should have been back here three hours ago but for the wreck. It was bitter work down on the shore; and the wind seems to have caught my eyes, they smart terribly."

"And how did you find Mrs. Morris?" I asked.

"Baddish, very bad, Jessie says. I didn't see her. The doctors think it is a break up."

"Poor Jessie!" I exclaimed. "Did you tell her I would go over to her any moment?"

"She does not want help, so she declares, but I promised her you should be there to-morrow. She is not a girl to be left to herself in a difficulty."

"I could drive you over, Ursie," said Roger.

"Yes," I said, carelessly; "but, William, who are those men in the kitchen?"

"Compton fellows, who were down on the shore helping about the wreck. We were all going wrong together when Roger hailed us. It's his doing, having them in and giving them a glass of ale. I am not given to such extravagance, Ursie," and William laughed the first hearty laugh I had heard since Leah's death.

I went out to the men myself to see if they had every thing comfortable. They were making a hearty supper, and it did my heart good to see something like the old Sandcombe hospitality, which I used to hear of in my young days. They were not gone till nearly ten o'clock. When I went back to the parlour I found William and Roger sitting over the fire, deep in business already. Roger started up as I put a candle before him, and told him it was time to go to bed.

"Time! not yet, Trot; why the evening is just begun."

"It is time, though," I said, "for folks who must get up with the cock-crowing."

He lingered a little, thinking. "Trot, you and I used to thank God for taking care of us, before we went to bed. I have come through a rough time lately. What do you say, William; mightn't we have prayers?"

William was taken so by surprise he could not object, and I don't believe he wished it. I stepped out of the room, and called Martha, and we all knelt down, and Roger said some of the prayers from the evening service, and thanked God for bringing him safe home. That was the first beginning of family prayer at Sandcombe.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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